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THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN

IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS

1916

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# THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN

IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS

1916

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

AUTHOR OF

'THE GREAT BOER WAR,' ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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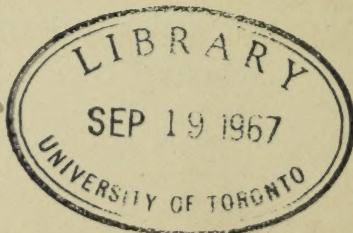
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## PREFACE

IN two previous volumes of this work a narrative has been given of those events which occurred upon the British Western Front during 1914, the year of recoil, and 1915, the year of equilibrium. In this volume will be found the detailed story of 1916, the first of the years of attack and advance.

Time is a great toner down of superlatives, and the episodes which seem world-shaking in our day may, when looked upon by the placid eyes of historical philosophers in days to come, fit more easily into the general scheme of human experience. None the less it can be said without fear of ultimate contradiction that nothing approaching to the Battle of the Somme, with which this volume is mainly concerned, has ever been known in military history, and that it is exceedingly improbable that it will ever be equalled in its length and in its severity. It may be said to have raged with short intermissions, caused by the breaking of the weather, from July 1 to November 14, and during this prolonged period the picked forces of three great nations were locked in close battle. The number of combatants from first to last was between

two and three millions, and their united casualties came to the appalling total of at least three-quarters of a million. These are minimum figures, but they will give some idea of the unparalleled scale of the operations.

With the increasing number and size of the units employed the scale of the narrative becomes larger. It is more difficult to focus the battalion, while the individual has almost dropped out of sight. Sins of omission are many, and the chronicler can but plead the great difficulty of his task and regret that his limited knowledge may occasionally cause disappointment.

The author should explain that this volume has had to pass through three lines of censors, suffering heavily in the process. It has come out with the loss of all personal names save those of casualties or of high Generals. Some passages also have been excised. On the other hand it is the first which has been permitted to reveal the exact identity of the units engaged. The missing passages and names will be restored when the days of peace return.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

*February 3, 1918.*



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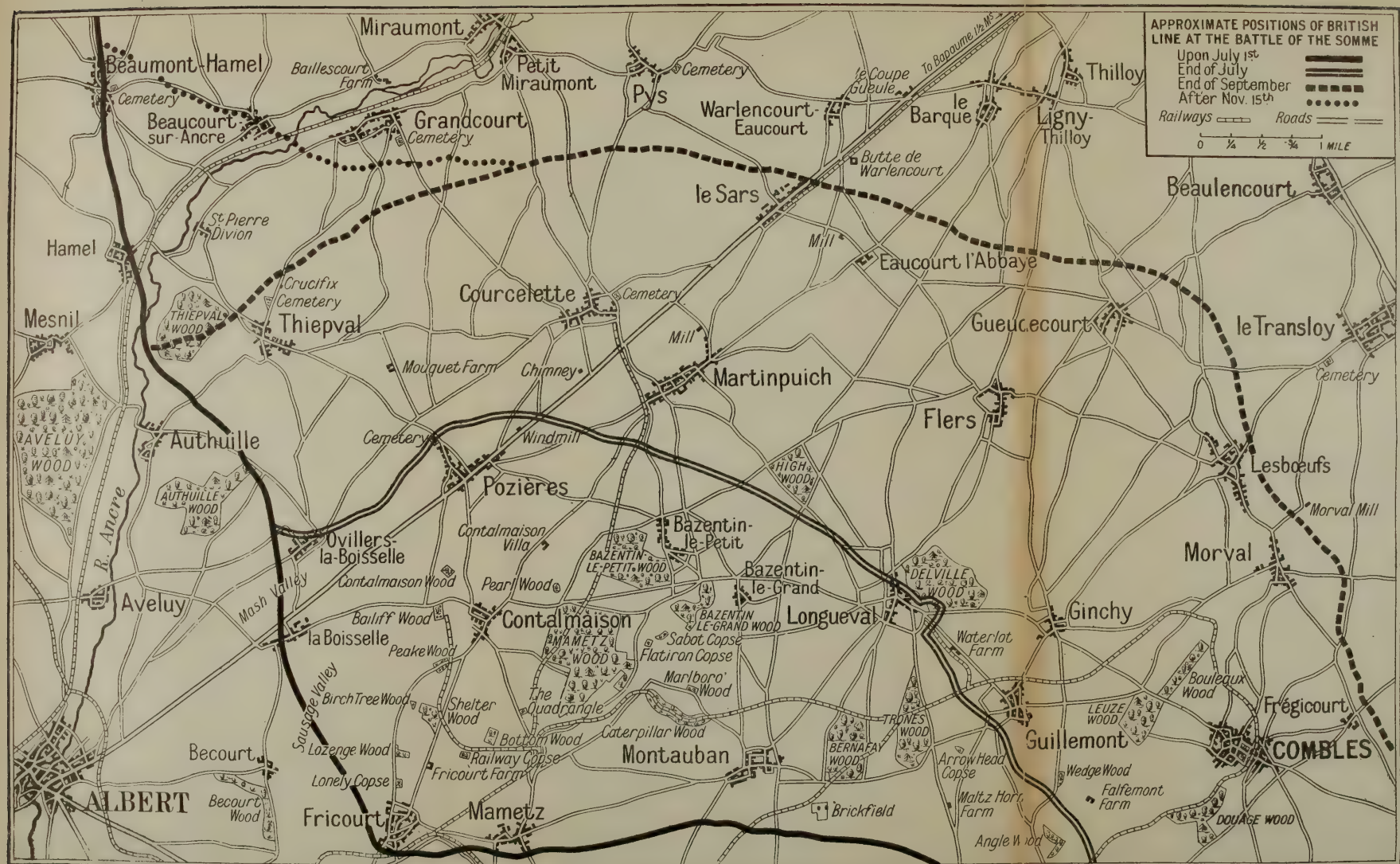
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## CHAPTER I

JANUARY TO JULY 1916

General situation—The fight for the Bluff—The Mound of St. Eloi—  
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THE Great War had now come into its second winter—a winter which was marked by an absolute cessation of all serious fighting upon the Western front. Enormous armies were facing each other, but until the German attack upon the French lines of Verdun at the end of February, the infantry of neither side was seriously engaged. There were many raids and skirmishes, with sudden midnight invasions of hostile trenches and rapid returns with booty or prisoners. Both sides indulged in such tactics upon the British front. Gas attacks, too, were occasionally attempted, some on a large scale and with considerable result. The condition of the troops, though it could not fail to be trying, was not so utterly miserable as during the first cold season in the trenches. The British had ceased to be a mere fighting fringe with nothing behind it. The troops were numerous and eager, so that reliefs were frequent. All sorts of devices were

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adopted for increasing the comfort and conserving the health of the men. Steadily as the winter advanced and the spring ripened into summer, fresh divisions were passed over the narrow seas, and the shell-piles at the bases marked the increased energy and output of the workers in the factories. The early summer found everything ready for a renewed attempt upon the German line.

The winter of 1915-16 saw the affairs of the Allies in a condition which could not be called satisfactory, and which would have been intolerable had there not been evident promise of an amendment in the near future. The weakness of the Russians in munitions had caused their gallant but half-armed armies to be driven back until the whole of Poland had fallen into the hands of the Germanic Powers, who had also reconquered Galicia and Bukovina. The British attempt upon Gallipoli, boldly conceived and gallantly urged, but wanting in the essential quality of surprise, had failed with heavy losses, and the army had to be withdrawn. Serbia and Montenegro had both been overrun and occupied, while the efficient Bulgarian army had ranged itself with our enemies. The Mesopotamian Expedition had been held up by the Turks, and the brave Townshend, with his depleted division, was hemmed in at Kut, where, after a siege of five months, he was eventually compelled, upon April 26, to lay down his arms, together with 9000 troops, chiefly Indian. When one remembers that on the top of this Germany already held Belgium and a considerable slice of the north of France, which included all the iron and coal producing centres, it must be admitted that the Berlin Press had some reason upon its side when it insisted that it had



already won the War upon paper. To realise that paper, was, however, an operation which was beyond their powers.

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What could the Allies put against these formidable successes? There was the Colonial Empire of Germany. Only one colony, the largest and most powerful, still remained. This was East Africa. General Smuts, a worthy colleague of the noble Botha, had undertaken its reduction, and by the summer the end was in sight. The capture of the colonies would then be complete. The oceans of the world were another asset of the Allies. These also were completely held, to the absolute destruction of all German oversea commerce. These two conquests, and the power of blockade which steadily grew more stringent, were all that the Allies could throw into the other scale, save for the small corner of Alsace still held by the French, the southern end of Mesopotamia, and the port of Salonica, which was a strategic checkmate to the southern advance of the Germans. The balance seemed all against them. There was no discouragement, however, for all these difficulties had been discounted and the Allies had always recognised that their strength lay in those reserves which had not yet had time to develop. The opening of the summer campaign of 1916, with the capture of Erzeroum, the invasion of Armenia, and the reconquest of Bukovina, showed that the Russian army had at last found its second wind. The French had already done splendid work in their classical resistance at Verdun, which had extended from the last weeks of February onwards, and had cost the Germans over a quarter of a million of casualties. The opening of the British campaign in July found the whole

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army most eager to emulate the deeds of its Allies, and especially to take some of the weight from the splendid defenders of Verdun. Their fight against very heavy odds in men, munitions, and transport, was one of the greatest deeds of arms, possibly the greatest deed of arms of the war. It was known, however, before July that a diversion was absolutely necessary, and although the British had taken over a fresh stretch of trenches so as to release French reinforcements, some more active help was imperatively called for.

Before describing the summer campaign it is necessary to glance back at the proceedings of the winter and spring upon the British line, and to comment upon one or two matters behind that line which had a direct influence upon the campaign. Of the minor operations to which allusion has already been made, there are none between the Battle of Loos and the middle of February 1916 which call for particular treatment. Those skirmishes and mutual raidings which took place during that time centred largely round the old salient at Ypres and the new one at Loos, though the lines at Armentières were also the scene of a good deal of activity. One considerable attack seems to have been planned by the Germans on the north-east of Ypres in the Christmas week of 1915—an attack which was preceded by a formidable gas attack. The British artillery was so powerful, however, that it crushed the advance in the trenches, where the gathered bayonets of the stormers could be seen going down before the scourging shrapnel like rushes before a gale. The infantry never emerged, and the losses must have been very heavy. This was the only considerable attempt made by either side during the winter.

At the time of Lord French's return another change was made at home which had a very immediate bearing upon the direction of the War. Britain had suffered greatly from the fact that at the beginning of hostilities the distinguished officers who composed the central staff had all been called away for service in the field. Lord Kitchener had done wonders in filling their place, but it was impossible for any man, however great his abilities or energy, to carry such a burden upon his shoulders. The more conscientious the man the more he desires to supervise everything himself and the more danger there is that all the field cannot be covered. Already the recruiting service, which had absorbed a great deal of Lord Kitchener's energies with most splendid results, had been relegated to Lord Derby, whose tact and wisdom produced fresh armies of volunteers. Now the immediate direction of the War and the supervision of all that pertained to the armies in the field was handed over to Sir William Robertson, a man of great organising ability and of proved energy. From this time onwards his character and judgment bulked larger and larger as one of the factors which made for the success of the Allies.

In January 1916 Britain gave her last proof of the resolution with which she was waging war. Already she had shown that no question of money could diminish her ardour, for she was imposing direct taxation upon her citizens with a vigour which formed the only solid basis for the credit of the Allies. Neither our foes nor our friends have shown such absolute readiness to pay in hard present cash, that posterity might walk with a straighter back, and many a man was paying a good half of his income



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to the State. But now a sacrifice more intimate than that of money had to be made. It was of that personal liberty which is as the very breath of our nostrils. This also was thrown with a sigh into the common cause, and a Military Service Bill was passed by which every citizen from 19 to 41 was liable to be called up. It is questionable whether it was necessary as yet as a military measure, since the enormous number of 5,000,000 volunteers had come forward, but as an act of justice by which the burden should be equally distributed, and the shirker compelled to his duty, it was possible to justify this radical departure from the customs of our fathers and the instincts of our race. Many who acquiesced in its necessity did so with a heavy heart, feeling how glorious would have been our record had it been possible to bring forward by the stress of duty alone the manhood of the nation. As a matter of fact, the margin left over was neither numerous nor important, but the energies of the authorities were now released from the incessant strain which the recruiting service had caused.

The work of the trenches was made easier for the British by the fact that they had at last reached an equality with, and in many cases a superiority to, their enemy, in the number of their guns, the quantity of their munitions, and the provision of those smaller weapons such as trench mortars and machine-guns which count for so much in this description of warfare. Their air supremacy which had existed for a long time was threatened during some months by the Fokker machines of the Germans, and by the skill with which their aviators used them, but faster models from England soon restored the balance.



There had been a time also when the system and the telescopic sights of the German snipers had given them an ascendancy. Thanks to the labours of various enthusiasts for the rifle, this matter was set right and there were long stretches of the line where no German head could for an instant be shown above the parapet. The Canadian sector was particularly free from any snipers save their own.

The first serious operation of the spring of 1916 upon the British line was a determined German attack upon that section which lies between the Ypres-Comines Canal and the Ypres-Comines railway on the extreme south of the Ypres salient; Hill 60 lies to the north of it. In the line of trenches there was one small artificial elevation, not more than thirty feet above the plain. This was called the Bluff, and was the centre of the attack. It was of very great importance as a point of artillery observation. During the whole of February 13 the bombardment was very severe, and losses were heavy along a front of several miles, the right of which was held by the Seventeenth Division, the centre by the Fiftieth, and the left by the Twenty-fourth. Finally, after many of the trenches had been reduced to dirt heaps five mines were simultaneously sprung under the British front line, each of them of great power. The explosions were instantly followed by a rush of the German infantry. In the neighbourhood of the Bluff, the garrison, consisting at that point of the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers, were nearly all buried or killed. To the north lay the 10th Sherwood Foresters and north of them the 8th South Staffords, whose Colonel, though four times wounded, continued

to direct the defence. It was impossible, however, to hold the whole line, as the Germans had seized the Bluff and were able to enfilade all the trenches of the Sherwoods, who lost twelve officers and several hundred men before they would admit that their position was untenable. The South Staffords being farther off were able to hold on, but the whole front from their right to the canal south of the Bluff was in the hands of the Germans, who had very rapidly and skilfully consolidated it. A strong counter-attack by the 7th Lincolns and 7th Borders, in which the survivors of the Lancashire Fusiliers took part, had some success, but was unable to permanently regain the lost sector, six hundred yards of which remained with the enemy. A lieutenant, with 40 bombers of the Lincolns, 38 of whom fell, did heroic work.

The attack had extended to the north, where it had fallen upon the Fiftieth Division, and to the Twenty-fourth Division upon the left of it. Here it was held and eventually repulsed. Of the company of the 9th Sussex who held the extreme left of the line, a large portion were blown up by a mine and forty were actually buried in the crater. Young Lieutenant McNair, however, the officer in charge, showed great energy and presence of mind. He held the Germans from the crater and with the help of another officer, who had rushed up some supports, drove them back to their trenches. For this McNair received his Victoria Cross. The 3rd Rifle Brigade, a veteran regular battalion, upon the right of the Sussex, had also put up a vigorous resistance, as had the central Fiftieth Division, so that in spite of the sudden severity of the attack it was only at the one

point of the Bluff that the enemy had made a lodgment—that point being the real centre of their effort. They held on strongly to their new possession, and a vigorous fire with several partial attacks during the next fortnight failed to dislodge them.

Early in March the matter was taken seriously in hand, for the position was a most important one, and a farther advance at this point would have involved the safety of Ypres. The Seventeenth Division still held the supporting trenches, and these now became the starting-point for the attack. A considerable artillery concentration was effected, two brigades of guns and two companies of sappers were brought up from the Third Division, and the 76th Brigade of the same Division came up from St. Omer, where it had been resting, in order to carry out the assault. The general commanding this brigade was in immediate command of the operations.

The problem was a most difficult one, as the canal to the south and a marsh upon the north screened the flanks of the new German position, while its front was covered by shell-holes which the tempestuous weather had filled with water. There was nothing for it, however, but a frontal attack, and this was carried out with very great gallantry upon March 2, at 4.30 in the morning. The infantry left their trenches in the dark and crept forward undiscovered, dashing into the enemy's line with the first grey glimmer of the dawn. The right of the attack formed by the 2nd Suffolks had their revenge for Le Cateau, for they carried the Bluff itself with a rush. So far forward did they get that a number of Germans emerged from dug-outs in their rear, and were organising a dangerous attack when they were pelted back



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into their holes by a bombing party. Beyond the Bluff the Suffolks were faced by six deep shelters for machine-guns, which held them for a time but were eventually captured. The centre battalion consisted of the 8th Royal Lancasters, who lost heavily from rifle fire but charged home with great determination, flooding over the old German front line and their support trenches as well as their immediate objective. The left battalion in the attack were the 1st Gordon Highlanders, who had a most difficult task, being exposed to the heaviest fire of all. For a moment they were hung up, and then with splendid spirit threw themselves at the hostile trenches again and carried everything before them. They were much helped in this second attack by the supporting battalion, the 7th Lincolns, whose bombers rushed to the front. The 10th Welsh Fusiliers, who were supporting on the right, also did invaluable service by helping to consolidate the Bluff, while the 9th West Ridings on the left held the British front line and repulsed an attempt at a flanking counter-attack.

In spite of several counter-attacks and a very severe bombardment the line now held firm, and the Germans seem to have abandoned all future designs upon this section. They had lost very heavily in the assault, and 250 men with 5 officers remained in the hands of the victors. Some of the German trench taken was found to be untenable, but the 12th West Yorkshires of the 8th Brigade connected up the new position with the old and the salient was held. So ended a well-managed and most successful little fight. Great credit was due to a certain officer, who passed through the terrible



German barrage again and again to link up the troops with headquarters. Extreme gallantry was shown also by the brigade-runners, many of whom lost their lives in the all-important work of preserving communications.

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Students of armour in the future may be interested to note that this was the first engagement in which British infantry reverted after a hiatus of more than two centuries to the use of helmets. Dints of shrapnel upon their surfaces proved in many cases that they had been the salvation of their wearers. Several observers have argued that trench warfare implies a special trench equipment, entirely different from that for surface operations.

In the middle of March the pressure upon the French at Verdun had become severe, and it was determined to take over a fresh section of line so as to relieve troops for the north-eastern frontier. General Foch's Tenth Army, which had held the sector opposite to Souchez and Lorette, was accordingly drawn out, and twelve miles were added to the British front. From this time forward there were four British armies, the Second (Plumer) in the Ypres district, the First (Monro) opposite to Neuve Chapelle, the Third (Allenby) covering the new French sector down to Arras, the Fourth (Rawlinson) from Albert to the Somme.

A brisk skirmish which occurred in the south about this period is worthy of mention—typical of many smaller affairs the due record of which would swell this chapter to a portentous length. In this particular instance, a very sudden and severe night attack was directed by the Germans against a post held by the 8th East Surreys of the Eighteenth

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Division at the points where the British and French lines meet just north of the Somme. This small stronghold, known as Ducks' Post, was at the head of a causeway across a considerable marsh, and possessed a strategic importance out of all proportion to its size. A violent bombardment in the darkness of the early morning of March 20 was followed by an infantry advance, pushed well home. It was an unnerving experience. "As the Huns charged," says one who was present, "they made the most hellish screaming row I ever heard." The Surrey men under the lead of a young subaltern stood fast, and were reinforced by two platoons. Not only did they hold up the attack, but with the early dawn they advanced in turn, driving the Germans back into their trenches and capturing a number of prisoners. The post was strengthened and was firmly held.

The next episode which claims attention is the prolonged and severe fighting which took place from March 27 onwards at St. Eloi, the scene of so fierce a contest just one year before. A small salient had been formed by the German line at this point ever since its capture, and on this salient was the rising known as the Mound (not to be confounded with the Bluff), insignificant in itself since it was only twenty or thirty feet high, but of importance in a war where artillery observation is the very essence of all operations. It stood just east of the little village of St. Eloi. This place was known to be very strongly held, so the task of attacking it was handed over to the Third Division, which had already shown at the Bluff that they were adepts at such an attack. After several weeks of energetic preparation, five

mines were ready with charges which were so heavy that in one instance 30,000 pounds of ammonal were employed. The assault was ordered for 4.15 in the morning of March 27. It was known to be a desperate enterprise and was entrusted to two veteran battalions of regular troops, the 4th Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. A frontal attack was impossible, so it was arranged that the Royals should sweep round the left flank and the Northumberlands the right, while the remaining battalions of the 9th Brigade, the 12th West Yorks and 1st Scots Fusiliers, should be in close support in the centre. At the appointed hour the mines were exploded with deadly effect, and in the pitch darkness of a cloudy rainy morning the two battalions sprang resolutely forward upon their dangerous venture. The trenches on each flank were carried, and 5 officers with 193 men of the 18th Reserve Jaeger fell into our hands. As usual, however, it was the retention of the captured position which was the more difficult and costly part of the operation. The Northumberlands had won their way round on the right, but the Fusiliers had been partially held up on the left, so that the position was in some ways difficult and irregular. The guns of the Third Division threw forward so fine a barrage that no German counter-attack could get forward, but all day their fire was very heavy and deadly upon the captured trenches, and also upon the two battalions in support. On the night of the 27th the 9th Brigade was drawn out and the 8th took over the new line, all access to it being impossible save in the darkness, as no communication trenches existed. The situation was complicated by the fact that although the British



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troops had on the right won their way to the rear of the craters, one of these still contained a German detachment, who held on in a most heroic fashion and could not be dislodged. On March 30 the situation was still unchanged, and the 76th Brigade was put in to relieve the 8th. The 1st Gordons were now in the line, very wet and weary, but declaring that they would hold the ground at all costs. It was clear that the British line must be extended and that the gallant Germans in the crater must be overwhelmed. For this purpose, upon the night of April 2, the 8th Royal Lancasters swept across the whole debatable ground, with the result that 4 officers and 80 men surrendered at daylight to the Brigade-Major and a few men who summoned them from the lip of the crater. The Divisional General had himself gone forward to see that the captured ground was made good. "We saw our Divisional General mid-thigh in water and splashing down the trenches," says an observer. "I can tell you it put heart into our weary men." So ended the arduous labours of the Third Division, who upon April 4 handed over the ground to the 2nd Canadians.

The episode of the St. Eloi craters was, however, far from being at an end. The position was looked upon as of great importance by the Germans, apart from the artillery observation, for their whole aim was the contraction, as that of the British was the expansion, of the space contained in the Ypres salient. "Elbow room! More elbow room!" was the hearts' cry of Plumer's Second Army. But the enemy grudged every yard, and with great tenacity began a series of counter-attacks which lasted with varying fortunes for several weeks.



Hardly had the Third Division filed out of the trenches when the German bombers were buzzing and stinging all down the new line, and there were evident signs of an impending counter-attack. Upon April 6 it broke with great violence, beginning with a blasting storm of shells followed by a rush of infantry in that darkest hour which precedes the dawn. It was a very terrible ordeal for troops which had up to then seen no severe service, and for the moment they were overborne. The attack chanced to come at the very moment when the 27th Winnipeg Regiment was being relieved by the 29th Vancouvers, which increased the losses and the confusion. The craters were taken by the German stormers with 180 prisoners, but the trench line was still held. The 31st Alberta Battalion upon the left of the position was involved in the fight and drove back several assaults, while a small French Canadian machine-gun detachment from the 22nd Regiment distinguished itself by an heroic resistance in which it was almost destroyed. About noon the bombardment was so terrific that the front trench was temporarily abandoned, the handful of survivors falling back upon the supports. The 31st upon the left were still able to maintain themselves, however, and after dusk they were able to reoccupy three out of the five craters in front of the line. From this time onwards the battle resolved itself into a desperate struggle between the opposing craters. During the whole of April 7 it was carried on with heavy losses to both parties. On one occasion a platoon of 40 Germans in close formation were shot down to a man as they rushed forward in a gallant forlorn hope. For three days the struggle went on, at the end of

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which time four of the craters were still held by the Canadians. Two medical men particularly distinguished themselves by their constant passage across the open space which divided the craters from the trench. The consolidation of the difficult position was admirably carried out by the C.R.E. of the Second Canadian Division.

The Canadians were left in comparative peace for ten days, but on April 19 there was a renewed burst of activity. Upon this day the Germans bombarded heavily, and then attacked with their infantry at four different points of the Ypres salient. At two they were entirely repulsed. On the Ypres-Langemark road on the extreme north of the British position they remained in possession of about a hundred yards of trench. Finally, in the crater region they won back two, including the more important one which was on the Mound. Night after night there were bombing attacks in this region, by which the Germans endeavoured to enlarge their gains. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were now opposed to them and showed the same determination as the men of the West. The sector held by the veteran First Canadian Division was also attacked, the 13th Battalion having 100 casualties and the Canadian Scots 50. Altogether this fighting had been so incessant and severe, although as a rule confined to a very small front, that on an average 1000 casualties a week were recorded in the corps. The fighting was carried on frequently in heavy rain, and the disputed craters became deep pools of mud in which men fought waist deep, and where it was impossible to keep rifle or machine-gun from being fouled and clogged. Several of the smaller craters were found

to be untenable by either side, and were abandoned to the corpses which lay in the mire.

The Germans did not long remain in possession of the trench which they had captured upon the 19th in the Langemarck direction. Though it was almost unapproachable on account of the deep mud, a storming column of the 1st Shropshires waded out to it in the dark up to their waists in slush, and turned the enemy out with the point of the bayonet. Upon April the 21st the line was completely re-established, though a sapper is reported to have declared that it was impossible to consolidate porridge. In this brilliant affair the Shropshires lost a number of officers and men, including their gallant Colonel, Luard, and Lieutenant Johnstone, who was shot by a sniper while boldly directing the consolidation from outside the parapet without cover of any kind. The whole incident was an extraordinarily fine feat of arms which could only have been carried out by a highly disciplined and determined body of men. The mud was so deep that men were engulfed and suffocated, and the main body had to throw themselves down and distribute their weight to prevent being sucked down into the quagmire. The rifles were so covered and clogged that all shooting was out of the question, and only bombs and bayonets were available for the assault. The old 53rd never did a better day's work.

During the whole winter the Loos salient had been simmering, as it had never ceased to do since the first tremendous convulsion which had established it. In the early part of the year it was held by cavalry brigades, taking turns in succession, and during this time there was a deceptive quiet, which



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was due to the fact that the Germans were busy in running a number of mines under the position. At the end of February the Twelfth Division took over the north of the section, and for ten weeks they found themselves engaged in a struggle which can only be described as hellish. How constant and severe it was may be gauged from the fact that without any real action they lost 4000 men during that period. As soon as they understood the state of affairs, which was only conveyed to them by several devastating explosions, they began to run their own mines and to raid those of their enemy. It was a nightmare conflict, half above ground, half below, and sometimes both simultaneously, so that men may be said to have fought in layers. The upshot of the matter, after ten weeks of fighting, was that the British positions were held at all points, though reduced to an extraordinary medley of craters and fissures, which some observer has compared to a landscape in the moon. The First Division shared with the Twelfth the winter honours of the dangerous Loos salient.

On April 27 a considerable surface attack developed on this part of the line, now held by the Sixteenth Irish Division. Early upon that day the Germans, taking advantage of the wind, which was now becoming almost as important in a land as it had once been in a sea battle, loosed a cloud of poison upon the trenches just south of Hulluch and followed it up by a rush of infantry which got possession of part of the front and support lines in the old region of the chalk-pit wood. The 49th Brigade was in the trenches. This Brigade consisted of the 7th and 8th Inniskillings, with the 7th and 8th Royal Irish. It was upon the first two battalions that the cloud of



gas descended, which seems to have been of a particularly deadly brew, since it poisoned horses upon the roads far to the rear. Many of the men were stupefied and few were in a condition for resistance when the enemy rushed to the trenches. Two battalions of Dublin Fusiliers, however, from the 48th Brigade were in the adjoining trenches and were not affected by the poison. These, together with the 8th Inniskillings, who were in the rear of the 7th, attacked the captured trench and speedily won it back. This was the more easy as there had been a sudden shift of wind which had blown the vile stuff back into the faces of the German infantry. A Bavarian letter taken some days later complained bitterly of their losses, which were stated to have reached 1300 from poison alone. The casualties of the Irish Division were about 1500, nearly all from gas, or shell-fire. Coming as it did at the moment when the tragic and futile rebellion in Dublin had seemed to place the imagined interests of Ireland in front of those of European civilisation, this success was most happily timed. The brunt of the fighting was borne equally by troops from the north and from the south of Ireland—a happy omen, we will hope, for the future.

Amongst the other local engagements which broke the monotony of trench life may be mentioned one upon May 11 near the Hohenzollern Redoubt where the Germans held for a short time a British trench, taking 127 of the occupants prisoners. More serious was the fighting upon the Vimy Ridge south of Souchez on May 15. About 7.30 on the evening of that day the British exploded a series of mines which, either by accident or design, were short of

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the German trenches. The sector was occupied by the Twenty-fifth Division, and the infantry attack was entrusted to the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers and the 9th North Lancashires, both of the 74th Brigade. They rushed forward with great dash and occupied the newly-formed craters, where they established themselves firmly, joining them up with each other and cutting communications backwards so as to make a new observation trench.

The Twenty-fifth Division lay at this time with the Forty-seventh London Division as its northern neighbour, the one forming the left-hand unit of the Third Army, and the other the extreme right of the First. Upon the 19th the Londoners took over the new position from the 74th, and found it to be an evil inheritance, for upon May 21, when they were in the very act of relieving the 7th and 75th Brigades, which formed the front of the Twenty-fifth Division, they were driven in by a terrific bombardment and assault from the German lines. On the front of a brigade the Germans captured not only the new ground won but our own front line and part of our supporting line. Old soldiers declared that the fire upon this occasion was among the most concentrated and deadly of the whole War. With the new weapons artillery is not needed at such short range, for with aerial torpedoes the same effect can be produced as with guns of a great calibre.

In the early morning of April 30, there was a strong attack by the Germans at Wulverghem, which was the village to the west of Messines, to which our line had been shifted after the attack of November 2, 1914. There is no doubt that all this bustling upon the part of the Germans was partly for the purpose

of holding us to our ground while they dealt with the French at Verdun, and partly to provoke a premature offensive, since they well knew that some great movement was in contemplation. As a matter of fact, all the attacks, including the final severe one upon the Canadian lines, were dealt with by local defenders and had no strategic effect at all. In the case of the Wulverghem attack it was preceded by an emission of gas of such intensity that it produced much sickness as far off as Bailleul, at least six miles to the west. Horses in the distant horse lines fell senseless under the noxious vapour. It came on with such rapidity that about a hundred men of the Twenty-fourth Division were overcome before they could get on their helmets. The rest were armed against it, and repelled the subsequent infantry attacks carried out by numerous small bodies of exploring infantry, without any difficulty. The whole casualties of the Fifth Corps, whose front was attacked, amounted to 400, half by gas and half by the shells.

In May, General Alderson, who had commanded the Canadians with such success from the beginning, took over new duties and gave place to General Sir Julian Byng, the gallant commander of the Third Cavalry Division.

Upon June 2 there began an action upon the Canadian front at Ypres which led to severe fighting extending over several weeks, and put a very heavy strain upon a corps the First Division of which had done magnificent work during more than a year, whilst the other two divisions had only just eased up after the fighting of the craters. Knowing well that the Allies were about to attack, the Germans were exceedingly anxious to gain some success which would

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compel them to disarrange their plans and to suspend that concentration of troops and guns which must precede any great effort. In searching for such a success it was natural that they should revert to the Ypres salient, which had always been the weakest portion of the line—so weak, indeed, that when it is seen outlined by the star shells at night, it seems to the spectator to be almost untenable, since the curve of the German line was such that it could command the rear of all the British trenches. It was a region of ruined cottages, shallow trenches commanded by the enemy's guns, and shell-swept woods so shattered and scarred that they no longer furnished any cover. These woods, Zouave Wood, Sanctuary Wood, and others lie some hundred yards behind the front trenches and form a rallying-point for those who retire, and a place of assembly for those who advance.

The Canadian front was from four to five miles long, following the line of the trenches. The extreme left lay upon the ruined village of Hooze. This part of the line was held by the Royal Canadian Regiment. For a mile to their right, in front of Zouave and Sanctuary Woods, the Princess Patricia's held the line over low-lying ground. In immediate support was the 49th Regiment. These all belonged to the 7th Canadian Brigade. This formed the left or northern sector of the position.

In the centre was a low hill called Mount Sorel, in which the front trenches were located. Immediately in its rear is another elevation, somewhat higher, and used as an observing station. This was Observatory Hill. A wood, Armagh Wood, covered the slope of this hill. There is about two hundred yards



of valley between Mount Sorel and Observatory Hill, with a small stream running down it. This section of the line was essential for the British, since in the hands of the enemy it would command all the rest. It was garrisoned by the 8th Brigade, consisting of Canadian Mounted Rifles.

The right of the Canadian line, including St. Eloi upon the extreme limit of their sector, was held by troops of the Second Canadian Division. This part of the line was not involved in the coming attack. It broke upon the centre and the left, the Mount Sorel and the Hoge positions.

The whole operation was very much more important than was appreciated by the British public at the time, and formed a notable example of anticipatory tactics upon the part of the German General Staff. Just as they had delayed the advance upon the west by their furious assault upon Verdun on the east, so they now calculated that by a fierce attack upon the north of the British line they might disperse the gathering storm which was visibly banking up in the Somme Valley. It was a bold move, boldly carried out, and within appreciable distance of success.

Their first care was to collect and concentrate a great number of guns and mine-throwers on the sector to be attacked. This concentration occurred at the very moment when our own heavy artillery was in a transition stage, some of it going south to the Somme. Hardly a gun had sounded all morning. Then in an instant with a crash and a roar several mines were sprung under the trenches, and a terrific avalanche of shells came smashing down among the astounded men. It is doubtful if a more hellish

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storm of projectiles of every sort had ever up to that time been concentrated upon so limited a front. There was death from the mines below, death from the shells above, chaos and destruction all around. The men were dazed and the trenches both in front and those of communication were torn to pieces and left as heaps of rubble.

One great mine destroyed the loop of line held by the Princess Patricia's and buried a company in the ruins. A second exploded at Mount Sorel and did great damage. At the first outburst Generals Mercer and Williams had been hurried into a small tunnel out of the front line, but the mine explosion obliterated the mouth of the tunnel and they were only extricated with difficulty. General Mercer was last seen encouraging the men, but he had disappeared after the action and his fate was unknown to friend or foe until ten days later his body was found with both legs broken in one of the side trenches. He died as he had lived, a very gallant soldier. For four hours the men cowered down in what was left of the trenches, awaiting the inevitable infantry attack which would come from the German lines fifty yards away. When at last it came it met with little resistance, for there were few to resist. Those few were beaten down by the rush of the Württembergers who formed the attacking division. They carried the British line for a length of nearly a mile, from Mount Sorel to the south of Hooze, and they captured about 500 men, a large proportion of whom were wounded. General Williams, Colonel Usher, and twelve other officers were taken.

When the German stormers saw the havoc in the trenches they may well have thought that they had

only to push forward to pierce the line and close their hands at last upon the coveted Ypres. If any such expectation was theirs, they must have been new troops who had no knowledge of the dour tenacity of the Canadians. The men who first faced poison gas without masks were not so lightly driven. The German attack was brought to a standstill by the withering rifle-fire from the woods, and though the assailants were still able to hold the ground occupied they were unable to increase their gains, while in spite of a terrific barrage of shrapnel fresh Canadian battalions, the 14th and 15th from the 3rd Canadian Brigade, were coming up from the rear to help their exhausted companions.

The evening of June 2 was spent in confused skirmishing, the advanced patrols of the Germans getting into the woods and being held up by the Canadian infantry moving up to the front. Some German patrols are said to have got as far as Zillebeke village, three-quarters of a mile in advance of their old line. By the morning of June 3 these intruders had been pushed back, but a counter-attack before dawn by the 9th Brigade was held up by artillery fire, Colonel Hay of the 52nd (New Ontario) Regiment and many officers and men being put out of action. The British guns were now hard at work, and the Würtembergers in the captured trenches were enduring something of what the Canadians had undergone the day before. About 7 o'clock the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Brigades, veterans of Ypres, began to advance, making their way through the woods and over the bodies of the German skirmishers. When the advance got in touch with the captured trenches it was held up, for the Würtembergers stood to it



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like men, and were well supported by their gunners. On the right the 7th and 10th Canadians got well forward, but had not enough weight for a serious attack. It became clear that a premature counter-attack might lead to increased losses, and that the true method was to possess one's soul in patience until the preparation could be made for a decisive operation. The impatience and ardour of the men were very great, and their courage had a fine edge put upon it by a churlish German official communiqué, adding one more disgrace to their military annals, which asserted that more Canadian prisoners had not been taken because they had fled so fast. Canadians could smile at the insult, but it was the sort of smile that is more menacing than a frown. The infantry waited grimly while some of the missing guns were recalled into their position. Up to this time the losses had been about 80 officers and 2000 men.

The weather was vile, with incessant rain which turned the fields into bogs and the trenches into canals. For a few days things were at a standstill, for the clouds prevented aeroplane reconnaissance and the registration of the guns. The Corps lay in front of its lost trenches like a wounded bear looking across with red eyes at its stolen cub. The Germans had taken advantage of the lull to extend their line, and on June 6 they had occupied the ruins of Hooge, which were impossible to hold after all the trenches to the south had been lost. In their new line the Germans awaited the attack which they afterwards admitted that they knew to be inevitable. The British gunfire was so severe that it was very difficult for them to improve their new position.

On the 13th the weather had moderated and all



was ready for the counter-attack. It was carried out at two in the morning by two composite brigades. The 3rd (Toronto) and 7th Battalions led upon the right, while the 13th (Royal Highlanders) and 16th (Canadian Scots) were in the van of the left, with their pipers skirling in front of them. Machine-guns supported the whole advance. The right flank of the advance, being exposed to the German machine-guns, was shrouded by the smoke of 200 bombs. The night was a very dark one and the Canadian Scots had taken advantage of it to get beyond the front line, and, as it proved, inside the German barrage zone, so that heavy as it was it did them no scathe. The new German line was carried with a magnificent rush, and a second heave lifted the wave of stormers into the old British trenches—or the place where they had been. Nine machine-guns and 150 prisoners from the 119th, 120th, 125th, and 127th Würtemberg Regiments were captured. To their great joy the Canadians discovered that such munitions as they had abandoned upon June 2 were still in the trenches and reverted into their hands. It is pleasant to add that evidence was found that the Würtembergers had behaved with humanity towards the wounded. From this time onwards the whole Canadian area from close to Hooze (the village still remained with the enemy) across the front of the woods, over Mount Sorel, and on to Hill 60, was consolidated and maintained. Save the heavy reciprocal losses neither side had anything to show for all their desperate fighting, save that the ruins of Hooze were now German. The Canadian losses in the total operations came to about 7000 men—a figure which is eloquent as to the severity of the fighting. They emerged

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from the ordeal with their military reputation more firmly established than ever. Ypres will surely be a place of pilgrimage for Canadians in days to come, for the ground upon the north of the city and also upon the south-east is imperishably associated with the martial traditions of their country. The battle just described is the most severe action between the epic of Loos upon the one side, and that tremendous episode in the south, upon the edge of which we are now standing.

There is one other happening of note which may in truth be taken as an overture of that gigantic performance. This was the action of the Seventeenth Corps upon June 30, the eve of the Somme battle, in which the Thirty-ninth Division, supported by guns from the Thirty-fifth and Fifty-first Divisions upon each side of it, attacked the German trenches near Richebourg at a spot known as the Boar's Head. The attack was so limited in the troops employed and so local in area that it can only be regarded as a feint to take the German attention from the spot where the real danger was brewing.

After an artillery preparation of considerable intensity, the infantry assault was delivered by the 12th and 13th Royal Sussex of the 116th Brigade. The scheme was that they should advance in three waves and win their way to the enemy support line, which they were to convert into the British front line, while the divisional pioneer battalion, the 13th Gloster, was to join it up to the existing system by new communication trenches. For some reason, however, a period of eleven hours seems to have elapsed between the first bombardment and the actual attack. The latter was delivered at three

in the morning after a fresh bombardment of only ten minutes. So ready were the Germans that an observer has remarked that had a string been tied from the British batteries to the German the opening could not have been more simultaneous, and they had brought together a great weight of metal. Every kind of high explosive, shrapnel, and trench mortar bombs rained on the front and support line, the communication trenches and No Man's Land, in addition to a most hellish fire of machine-guns. The infantry none the less advanced with magnificent ardour, though with heavy losses. On occupying the German front line trenches there was ample evidence that the guns had done their work well, for the occupants were lying in heaps. The survivors threw bombs to the last moment, and then cried, "Kamerad!" Few of them were taken back. Two successive lines were captured, but the losses were too heavy to allow them to be held, and the troops had eventually under heavy shell-fire to fall back on their own front lines. Only three officers came back unhurt out of the two battalions, and the losses of rank and file came to a full two-thirds of the number engaged. "The men were magnificent," says one who led them, but they learned the lesson which was awaiting so many of their comrades in the south, that all human bravery cannot overcome conditions which are essentially impossible. A heavy German bombardment continued for some time, flattening out the trenches and inflicting losses, not only upon the 39th but upon the 51st Highland Territorial Division. This show of heavy artillery may be taken as the most pleasant feature in the whole episode, since it shows that its object was attained at least to the very important



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extent of holding up the German guns. Those heavy batteries upon the Somme might well have modified our successes of the morrow.

A second attack made with the same object of distracting the attention of the Germans and holding up their guns was made at an earlier date at a point called the triangle opposite to the Double Crassier near Loos. This attack was started at 9.10 upon the evening of June 10, and was carried out in a most valiant fashion by the 2nd Rifles and part of the 2nd Royal Sussex, both of the 2nd Brigade. There can be no greater trial for troops, and no greater sacrifice can be demanded of a soldier, than to risk and probably lose his life in an attempt which can obviously have no permanent result, and is merely intended to ease pressure elsewhere. The gallant stormers reached and in several places carried the enemy's line, but no lasting occupation could be effected, and they had eventually to return to their own line. The Riflemen, who were the chief sufferers, lost 11 officers and 200 men.

A word should be said as to the raids along the line of the German trenches by which it was hoped to distract their attention from the point of attack, and also to obtain precise information as to the disposition of their units. It is difficult to say whether the British were the gainers or the losers on balance in these raids, for some were successful, while some were repelled. Among a great number of gallant attempts, the details of which hardly come within the scale of this chronicle, the most successful perhaps were two made by the 9th Highland Light Infantry and by the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, both of the Thirty-third Division. In both of these cases very extensive damage was done and numerous prisoners were taken.



When one reads the intimate accounts of these affairs, the stealthy approaches, the blackened faces, the clubs and revolvers which formed the weapons, the ox-goads for urging Germans out of dug-outs, the dark lanterns and the knuckle-dusters—one feels that the age of adventure is not yet past and that the spirit of romance was not entirely buried in the trenches of modern war. There were 70 such raids in the week which preceded the great attack.

Before plunging into the huge task of following and describing the various phases of the mighty Battle of the Somme a word must be said upon the naval history of the period which can all be summed up in the Battle of Jutland, since the situation after that battle was exactly as it had always been before it. This fact in itself shows upon which side the victory lay, since the whole object of the movements of the German Fleet was to produce a relaxation in these conditions. Through the modesty of the British bulletins, which was pushed somewhat to excess, the position for some days was that the British, who had won everything, claimed nothing, while the Germans, who had won nothing, claimed everything. It is true that a number of our ships were sunk and of our sailors drowned, including Hood and Arbuthnot, two of the ablest of our younger admirals. Even by the German accounts, however, their own losses in proportion to their total strength were equally heavy, and we have every reason to doubt their accounts since they not only do not correspond with reliable observations upon our side, but because their second official account was compelled to admit that their first one had been false. The whole affair may be summed up by saying that after making an excellent

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fight they were saved from total destruction by the haze of evening, and fled back in broken array to their ports, leaving the North Sea now as always in British keeping. At the same time it cannot be denied that here as at Coronel and the Falklands the German ships were well fought, the gunnery was good, and the handling of the fleet, both during the battle and especially under the difficult circumstances of the flight in the darkness to avoid a superior fleet between themselves and home, was of a high order. It was a good clean fight, and in the general disgust at the flatulent claims of the Kaiser and his press the actual merit of the German performance did not perhaps receive all the appreciation which it deserved.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Seventh and Eighth Corps on Gommecourt, Serre, and Beaumont Hamel

Line of battle in the Somme sector—Great preparations—Advance of Forty-sixth North Midland Division—Advance of Fifty-sixth Territorials (London)—Great valour and heavy losses—Advance of Thirty-first Division—Advance of Fourth Division—Advance of Twenty-ninth Division—Complete failure of the assault.

THE continued German pressure at Verdun which had reached a high point in June called insistently for an immediate allied attack at the western end of the line. With a fine spirit of comradeship General Haig had placed himself and his armies at the absolute disposal of General Joffre, and was prepared to march them to Verdun, or anywhere else where he could best render assistance. The solid Joffre, strong and deliberate, was not disposed to allow the western offensive to be either weakened or launched prematurely on account of German attacks at the eastern frontier. He believed that Verdun could for the time look after herself, and the result showed the clearness of his vision. Meanwhile, he amassed a considerable French army, containing many of his best active troops, on either side of the Somme. General Foch was in command. They formed the right wing of the

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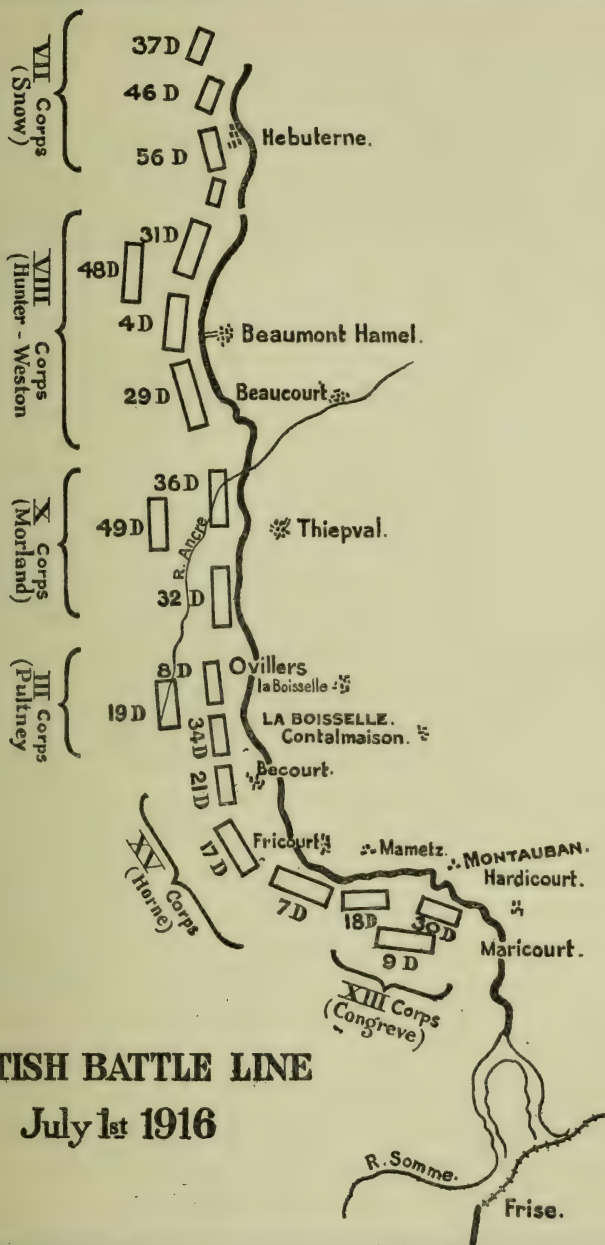
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great allied force about to make a big effort to break or shift the iron German line, which had been built up with two years of labour, until it represented a tangled vista of trenches, parapets, and redoubts mutually supporting and bristling with machine-guns and cannon, for many miles of depth. Never in the whole course of history have soldiers been confronted with such an obstacle. Yet from general to private, both in the French and in the British armies, there was universal joy that the long stagnant trench life should be at an end, and that the days of action, even if they should prove to be days of death, should at last have come. Our concern is with the British forces, and so they are here set forth as they stretched upon the left or north of their good allies.

The southern end of the whole British line was held by the Fourth Army, commanded by General Rawlinson, an officer who has always been called upon when desperate work was afoot. His army consisted of five corps, each of which included from three to four divisions, so that his infantry numbered about 200,000 men, many of whom were veterans, so far as a man may live to be a veteran amid the slaughter of such a campaign. The Corps, counting from the junction with the French, were, the Thirteenth (Congreve), Fifteenth (Horne), Third (Pulteney), Tenth (Morland), and Eighth (Hunter-Weston). Their divisions, frontage, and the objectives will be discussed in the description of the battle itself.

North of Rawlinson's Fourth Army, and touching it at the village of Hébuterne, was Allenby's Third Army, of which one single corps, the Seventh (Snow), was engaged in the battle. This added three





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divisions, or about 30,000 infantry, to the numbers quoted above.

It had taken months to get the troops into position, to accumulate the guns, and to make the enormous preparations which such a battle must entail. How gigantic and how minute these are can only be appreciated by those who are acquainted with the work of the staffs. As to the Chief Staff of all, if a civilian may express an opinion upon so technical a matter, no praise seems to be too high for General Kiggell and the others under the immediate direction of Sir Douglas Haig, who had successively shown himself to be a great Corps General, a great Army leader, and now a great General-in-Chief. The preparations were enormous and meticulous, yet everything ran like a well-oiled piston-rod. Every operation of the attack was practised on similar ground behind the lines. New railheads were made, huge sidings constructed, and great dumps accumulated. The corps and divisional staffs were also excellent, but above all it was upon those hard-worked and usually overlooked men, the sappers, that the strain fell. Assembly trenches had to be dug, double communication trenches had to be placed in parallel lines, one taking the up-traffic and one the down, water supplies, bomb shelters, staff dug-outs, poison-gas arrangements, tunnels and mines—there was no end to the work of the sappers. The gunners behind laboured night after night in hauling up and concealing their pieces, while day after day they deliberately and carefully registered upon their marks. The question of ammunition supply had assumed incredible proportions. For the needs of one single corps forty-six miles of motor-lorries were engaged in bringing up

the shells. However, by the end of June all was in place and ready. The bombardment began about June 23, and was at once answered by a German one of lesser intensity. The fact that the attack was imminent was everywhere known, for it was absolutely impossible to make such preparations and concentrations in a secret fashion. "Come on, we are ready for you," was hoisted upon placards on several of the German trenches. The result was to show that they spoke no more than the truth.

There were limits, however, to the German appreciation of the plans of the Allies. They were apparently convinced that the attack would come somewhat farther to the north, and their plans, which covered more than half of the ground on which the attack actually did occur, had made that region impregnable, as we were to learn to our cost. Their heaviest guns and their best troops were there. They had made a far less elaborate preparation, however, at the front which corresponded with the southern end of the British line, and also on that which faced the French. The reasons for this may be surmised. The British front at that point is very badly supplied with roads (or was before the matter was taken in hand), and the Germans may well have thought that no advance upon a great scale was possible. So far as the French were concerned they had probably over-estimated the pre-occupation of Verdun and had not given our Allies credit for the immense reserve vitality which they were to show. The French front to the south of the Somme was also faced by a great bend of the river which must impede any advance. Then again it is wooded, broken country down there, and gives good concealment for masking an operation. These

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were probably the reasons which induced the Germans to make a miscalculation which proved to be an exceedingly serious one, converting what might have been a German victory into a great, though costly, success for the Allies, a prelude to most vital results in the future.

It is, as already stated, difficult to effect a surprise upon the large scale in modern warfare. There are still, however, certain departments in which with energy and ingenuity effects may be produced as unforeseen as they are disconcerting. The Air Service of the Allies, about which a book which would be one long epic of heroism could be written, had been growing stronger, and had dominated the situation during the last few weeks, but it had not shown its full strength nor its intentions until the evening before the bombardment. Then it disclosed both in most dramatic fashion. Either side had lines of stationary airships from which shell-fire is observed. To the stranger approaching the lines they are the first intimation that he is in the danger area, and he sees them in a double row, extending in a gradually dwindling vista to either horizon. Now by a single raid and in a single night, every observation airship of the Germans was brought in flames to the earth. It was a splendid coup, splendidly carried out. Where the setting sun had shone on a long German array the dawn showed an empty eastern sky. From that day for many a month the Allies had command of the air with all that it means to modern artillery. It was a good omen for the coming fight, and a sign of the great efficiency to which the British Air Service under General Trenchard had attained. The various types for scouting, for artillery work,



for raiding, and for fighting were all very highly developed and splendidly handled by as gallant and chivalrous a band of heroic youths as Britain has ever enrolled among her guardians. The new F.E. machine and the de Haviland Biplane fighting machine were at this time equal to anything the Germans had in the air.

The attack had been planned for June 28, but the weather was so tempestuous that it was put off until it should moderate, a change which was a great strain upon every one concerned. July 1 broke calm and warm with a gentle south-western breeze. The day had come. All morning from early dawn there was intense fire, intensely answered, with smoke barrages thrown during the last half-hour to such points as could with advantage be screened. At 7.30 the guns lifted, the whistles blew, and the eager infantry were over the parapets. The great Battle of the Somme, the fierce crisis of Armageddon, had come. In following the fate of the various British forces during this eventful and most bloody day we will begin at the northern end of the line, where the Seventh Corps (Snow) faced the salient of Gommecourt.

This corps consisted of the Thirty-seventh, Forty-sixth, and Fifty-sixth Divisions. The former was not engaged and lay to the north. The others were told off to attack the bulge on the German line, the Forty-sixth upon the north, and the Fifty-sixth upon the south, with the village of Gommecourt as their immediate objective. Both were well-tried and famous territorial units, the Forty-sixth North Midland being the division which carried the Hohenzollern Redoubt upon October 13, 1915, while the Fifty-sixth was made up of the old London territorial battalions,

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which had seen so much fighting in earlier days while scattered among the regular brigades. Taking our description of the battle always from the north end of the line we shall begin with the attack of the Forty-sixth Division.

The assault was carried out by two brigades, each upon a two-battalion front. Of these the 137th Brigade of Stafford men were upon the right, while the 139th Brigade of Sherwood Foresters were on the left, each accompanied by a unit of sappers. The 138th Brigade, less one battalion, which was attached to the 137th, was in reserve. The attack was covered so far as possible with smoke, which was turned on five minutes before the hour. The general instructions to both brigades were that after crossing No Man's Land and taking the first German line they should bomb their way up the communication trenches, and so force a passage into Gommecourt Wood. Each brigade was to advance in four waves at fifty yards interval, with six feet between each man. Warned by our past experience of the wastage of precious material, not more than 20 officers of each battalion were sent forward with the attack, and a proportional number of N.C.O.'s were also withheld. The average equipment of the stormers, here and elsewhere, consisted of steel helmet, haversack, water-bottle, rations for two days, two gas helmets, tear-goggles, 220 cartridges, two bombs, two sandbags, entrenching tool, wire-cutters, field dressings, and signal-flare. With this weight upon them, and with trenches which were half full of water, and the ground between a morass of sticky mud, some idea can be formed of the strain upon the infantry.

Both the attacking brigades got away with splendid steadiness upon the tick of time. In the case of the 137th Brigade the 6th South Staffords and 6th North Staffords were in the van, the former being on the right flank where it joined up with the left of the Fifty-sixth Division. The South Staffords came into a fatal blast of machine-gun fire as they dashed forward, and their track was marked by a thick litter of dead and wounded. None the less, they poured into the trenches opposite to them but found them strongly held by infantry of the Fifty-second German Division. There was some fierce bludgeon work in the trenches, but the losses in crossing had been too heavy and the survivors were unable to make good. The trench was held by the Germans and the assault repulsed. The North Staffords had also won their way into the front trenches, but in their case also they had lost so heavily that they were unable to clear the trench, which was well and stoutly defended. At the instant of attack, here as elsewhere, the Germans had put so terrific a barrage between the lines that it was impossible for the supports to get up and no fresh momentum could be added to the failing attack.

The fate of the right attack had been bad, but that of the left was even worse, for at this point we had experience of a German procedure which was tried at several places along the line with most deadly effect, and accounted for some of our very high losses. This device was to stuff their front line dug-outs with machine-guns and men, who would emerge when the wave of stormers had passed, attacking them from the rear, confident that their own rear was safe on account of the terrific barrage between the lines.



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In this case the stormers were completely trapped. The 5th and 7th Sherwood Foresters dashed through the open ground, carried the trenches and pushed forward on their fiery career. Instantly the barrage fell, the concealed infantry rose behind them, and their fate was sealed. With grand valour the leading four waves stormed their way up the communication trenches and beat down all opposition until their own dwindling numbers and the failure of their bombs left them helpless among their enemies. Thus perished the first companies of two fine battalions, and few survivors of them ever won their way back to the British lines. Brave attempts were made during the day to get across to their aid, but all were beaten down by the terrible barrage. In the evening the 5th Lincolns made a most gallant final effort to reach their lost comrades, and got across to the German front line which they found to be strongly held. So ended a tragic episode. The cause which produced it was, as will be seen, common to the whole northern end of the line, and depended upon factors which neither officers nor men could control, the chief of which were that the work of our artillery, both in getting at the trench garrisons and in its counter-battery effects had been far less deadly than we had expected. The losses of the division came to about 2700 men.

The attack upon the southern side of the Gommecourt peninsula, though urged with the utmost devotion and corresponding losses, had no more success than that in the north. There is no doubt that the unfortunate repulse of the 137th Brigade upon their left, occurring as it did while the Fifty-sixth Division was still advancing, enabled the

Germans to concentrate their guns and reserves upon the Londoners, but knowing what we know, it can hardly be imagined that under any circumstances, with failure upon either side of them, the division could have held the captured ground. The preparations for the attack had been made with great energy, and for two successive nights as many as 3000 men were out digging between the lines, which was done with such disciplined silence that there were not more than 50 casualties all told. The 167th Brigade was left in reserve, having already suffered heavily while holding the water-logged trenches during the constant shell-fall of the last week. The 7th Middlesex alone had lost 12 officers and 300 men from this cause—a proportion which may give some idea of what the heavy British bombardment may have meant to the Germans. The advance was, therefore, upon a two-brigade front, the 168th being on the right and the 169th upon the left. The London Scottish and the 12th London Rangers were the leading battalions of the 168th, while the Westminster and Victorias led the 169th with the 4th London, 13th Kensingtons, 2nd London and London Rifle Brigade in support. The advance was made with all the fiery dash with which the Cockney soldiers have been associated. The first, second, and third German lines of trench were successively carried, and it was not until they, or those of them who were left, had reached the fourth line that they were held. It was powerfully manned, bravely defended, and well provided with bombs—a terrible obstacle for a scattered line of weary and often wounded men. The struggle was a heroic one. Even now had their rear been clear, or had there been a shadow of support

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these determined men would have burst the only barrier which held them from Gommecourt. But the steel curtain of the barrage had closed down behind them, and every overrun trench was sending out its lurking occupants to fire into their defenceless backs. Bombs, too, are essential in such a combat, and bombs must ever be renewed, since few can be carried at a time. For long hours the struggle went on, but it was the pitiful attempt of heroic men to postpone that retreat which was inevitable. Few of the advanced line ever got back. The 3rd London, particularly, sent forward several hundred men with bombs, but hardly any got across. Sixty London Scots started on the same terrible errand. In the late afternoon the remains of the two brigades were back in the British front line, having done all, and more than all, that brave soldiers could be expected to do. The losses were very heavy. Never has the manhood of London in one single day sustained so grievous a loss. It is such hours which test the very soul of the soldier. War is not all careless slang and jokes and cigarettes, though such superficial sides of it may amuse the public and catch the eye of the descriptive writer. It is the most desperately earnest thing to which man ever sets his hand or his mind. Many a hot oath and many a frenzied prayer go up from the battle line. Strong men are shaken to the soul with the hysteria of weaklings, and balanced brains are dulled into vacancy or worse by the dreadful sustained shock of it. The more honour then to those who, broken and wearied, still hold fast in the face of all that human flesh abhors, bracing their spirits by a sense of soldierly duty and personal honour which is strong enough to prevail over death itself.



It is pleasing to be able to record an instance of good feeling upon the part of the enemy. Some remains of the old German spirit would now and again, though with sad rarity, shake itself free from the acrid and poisonous Prussian taint. On this occasion a German prisoner was sent back from our lines after nightfall with a note to the officer in command asking for details as to the fate of the British missing. An answer was found tied on to the barbed wire in the morning which gave the desired information. It is fair to state also that the wounded taken by the enemy appear to have met with good treatment.

So much for the gallant and tragic attack of the Seventh Corps. General Snow, addressing his men after the battle, pointed out that their losses and their efforts had not been all in vain. "I can assure you," he said, "that by your determined attack you managed to keep large forces of the enemy at your front, thereby materially assisting in the operations which were proceeding farther south with such marked success." No doubt the claim is a just one, and even while we mourn over the fate of four grand Army corps upon the left wing of the Allied Army, we may feel that they sacrificed themselves in order to assure the advance of those corps of their comrades to the south who had profited by the accumulation of guns and men to the north of them in order to burst their way through the German line. It is possible that here as on some other occasions the bitter hatred which the Germans had for the British, nurtured as it was by every lie which could appeal to their passions, had distorted their vision and twisted their counsels to an extent which proved to be their ruin.

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The Eighth Corps, a magnificent body of troops, was under the command of General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston. It consisted of the Forty-eighth South Midland Territorial Division, the Fourth Regular Division, the Twenty-ninth Regular Division, and the Thirty-first Division of the New Army. Their front extended from Hébuterne in the north, where they joined on to the Fifty-sixth Division, down to a point just north of the Ancre, and it faced the very strong German positions of Serre in the north, and of Beaumont Hamel in the centre. The latter was an exceptionally difficult place, for it contained enormous quarries and excavations in which masses of Germans could remain concealed, almost immune to shell-fire and ready to sally out when needed. In spite of the terrific bombardment the actual damage done to the enemy was not excessive, and neither his numbers, his *moral*, nor his guns had been seriously diminished.

The order of battle was as follows: the Forty-eighth Division was in reserve, save for the 143rd Warwick Brigade. Of this brigade two battalions, the 5th and 6th Warwicks, were placed on a defensive line with orders to hold the trenches for about a mile south of Hébuterne. The 7th and 8th Warwicks were attached to the Fourth Division for the assault.

Immediately south of the defensive line held by the two Warwick battalions was the Thirty-first Division, having Serre for its objective. South of this, and opposite to Beaumont Hamel, was the Fourth, and south of this again was the Twenty-ninth Division, which had returned from the magnificent failure of the Dardanelles, bearing with it a high reputation for efficiency and valour. Incorporated with it was a regiment of Newfoundlanders, men recruited from

among the fishers and farmers of that northern land, the oldest colony of Britain. Such was the force, comprising nearly 50,000 excellent infantry, who set forth upon the formidable adventure of forcing the lines of Beaumont Hamel. They were destined to show the absolute impossibility of such a task in the face of a steadfast unshaken enemy, supported by a tremendous artillery, but their story is a most glorious one, and many a great British victory contains no such record of tenacity and military virtue.

At a quarter past five the assaulting lines were in the assembly trenches, and shortly afterwards the smoke and artillery barrages were released. At 7.20 an enormous mine, which had been run under Hawthorn Redoubt in front of the Fourth Division, was exploded, and a monstrous column of *débris*, with the accompanying shock of an earthquake, warned friend and foe that the hour of doom, the crisis of such mighty preparations, was at hand. At 7.30 the whistles blew, and the men, springing with eager alacrity over the parapet, advanced in successive lines of assault against the German trenches.

Before giving in detail the circumstances which determined the result in each division, it may be well to avoid wearisome iteration by giving certain facts which are common to each. In every case the troops advanced in an extended formation of companies in successive waves. In nearly every case the German front line was seized and penetrated, in no case was there any hesitation or disorder among the advancing troops, but the highest possible degree of discipline and courage was shown by regulars, territorials, and men of the New Army, nor could it be said that there was any difference between them. In each case also



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the Germans met the assault with determined valour ; in each case the successive lines of trenches were more strongly held, and the assailants were attacked from the rear by those who emerged from the dug-outs behind them, and above all in each case a most murderous artillery fire was opened from a semi-circle all round the German position, but especially from one huge accumulation of heavy guns, said to number a hundred batteries, stationed on the high ground near Bucquoy and commanding the British position. These guns formed successive lines of barrage with shrapnel and high explosives, one of them about 200 yards behind the British line, to cut off the supports ; another 50 yards behind ; another 50 yards in front ; and a fourth of shrapnel which was under observed control, and followed the troops in their movements. The advanced lines of assault were able in most cases to get through before these barrages were effectively established, but they made it difficult, deadly, and often impossible for the lines who followed.

None the less it is the opinion of skilled observers that the shell-fire alone, however heavy, could not have taken the edge from the inexorable insistence of the British attack. It is to the skill and to the personal gallantry of the German machine-gunners that the result is to be traced. The bombardment of the German line had been so severe that it was hoped that most of the machine-guns had been rooted out. So indeed they had, but they had been withdrawn to the safety of excavations in the immediate rear. Suspecting this, the British artillery sprayed the ground behind the trenches with showers of shrapnel to prevent their being brought forward

again. This barrage was not sufficient to subdue the gunners, who dashed forward and established their pieces at the moment of the assault upon the various parapets and points of vantage, from which, regardless of their own losses, they poured a withering fire upon the infantry in the open. These brave Württembergers were seen, with riflemen at their side, exposed waist-deep and dropping fast, but mowing the open slope as with a scythe of steel. "I cannot," said a general officer, who surveyed the whole scene, "adequately express my admiration for the British who advanced, or for the Germans who stood up under such a heavy barrage to oppose them." It was indeed that contest between the chosen children of Odin in which Professor Cramb has declared that the high gods of virility might well rejoice.

We will now turn to the left of the line and carry on the detailed description of the general assault from that of the 56th Territorials in the north, who were linked up by the defensive line of the Warwicks. The Thirty-first Division was on the left of the Eighth Corps. Of this division, two brigades, the 93rd and the 94th, were in the line, with the 92nd in reserve. The 93rd, which consisted of the 15th, 16th, 18th West Yorks, and the 18th Durhams, was on the right, the 94th, including the 11th East Lancashires, and the 12th, 13th, and 14th York and Lancasters, was on the left. The advance was made upon a front of two companies, each company on a front of two platoons, the men extended to three paces interval. On the left the leading battalions were the 11th East Lancashires and 12th York and Lancasters, the latter on the extreme left

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flank of the whole division. That this position with its exposed flank was the place of honour and of danger, may be best indicated by the fact that the colonel and six orderlies were the only men who could be collected of this heroic Sheffield battalion upon the next morning. On the right the leading troops were the 15th and 16th West Yorks. These grand North-countrymen swept across No Man's Land, dressed as if on parade, followed in succession by the remaining battalions, two of which, the 13th and 14th York and Lancasters, were the special town units of Barnsley and Leeds. "I have never seen and could not have imagined such a magnificent display of gallantry, discipline, and determination," said the observer who was been already quoted. The men fell in lines, but the survivors with backs bent, heads bowed, and rifles at the port, neither quickened nor slackened their advance, but went forward as though it was rain and not lead which lashed them. Here and elsewhere the German machine-gunners not only lined the parapet, but actually rushed forward into the open, partly to get a flank fire, and partly to come in front of the British barrage. Before the blasts of bullets the lines melted away, and the ever-decreasing waves only reached the parapet here and there, lapping over the spot where the German front lines had been, and sinking for ever upon the farther side. About a hundred gallant men of the East Lancashires, favoured perhaps by some curve in the ground, got past more than one line of trenches, and a few desperate individuals even burst their way as far as Serre, giving a false impression that the village was in our hands. But the losses had been so heavy that the weight and momentum had gone out of the



attack, while the density of the resistance thickened with every yard of advance. By the middle of the afternoon the survivors of the two attacking brigades were back in their own front line trenches, having lost the greater part of their effectives. The 15th West Yorks had lost heavily in officers, and the 16th and 18th were little better off. The 18th Durhams suffered less, being partly in reserve. Of the 94th Brigade the two splendid leading battalions, the 11th East Lancashires and 12th York and Lancasters, had very many killed within the enemy line. The heaviest loss in any single unit was in the 11th East Lancashires. The strength of the position is indicated by the fact that when attacked by two divisions in November, with a very powerful backing of artillery, it was still able to hold its own.

The experiences of all the troops engaged upon the left of the British attack were so similar and their gallantry was so uniform, that any variety in description depends rather upon the units engaged than upon what befell them. Thus in passing from the Thirty-first Division to the Fourth upon their right, the general sequence of cause and effect is still the same. In this instance the infantry who rushed, or rather strode, to the assault were, counting from the right, the 1st East Lances, the 1st Rifle Brigade, and the 8th Warwicks, who were immediately followed by the 1st Hants, the 1st Somersets, and the 6th Warwicks, advancing with three companies in front and one in support. The objective here as elsewhere upon the left was the capture of the Serre-Grandcourt Ridge, with the further design of furnishing a defensive flank for the operations lower down. The troops enumerated belonged to the 11th Brigade, led by

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the gallant Prowse, who fell hit by a shell early in the assault, calling after his troops that they should remember that they were the Stonewall Brigade. The attack was pressed with incredible resolution, and met with severe losses. Again the front line was carried and again the thin fringe of survivors had no weight to drive the assault forward, whilst they had no cover to shelter them in the ruined lines which they had taken. The Somerset men had the honour of reaching the farthest point attained by the division. "If anything wants shifting the Somersets will do it." So said their General before the action. But both their flanks were in the air, and their position was an impossible one, while the right of the attack north of Beaumont Hamel had been entirely held up. Two units of the 10th Brigade advanced about 9 o'clock on the right, and two of the 12th on the left. These were in their order, the 2nd Dublins, 2nd Seaforths, 2nd Essex, and 1st King's Own Lancasters. All went forward with a will, but some could not get beyond their own front trenches, and few got over the German line. All the weight of their blood so lavishly and cheerfully given could not tilt the scale towards victory. Slowly the survivors of the Somersets and Rifle Brigade were beaten back with clouds of bombers at their heels. The 8th Warwicks, who, with some of the 6th Warwicks, had got as far forward as any of the supporting line, could not turn the tide. Late in the afternoon the assault had definitely failed, and the remainder were back in their own front trenches, which had now to be organised against the very possible counter-attack. Only two battalions of the division remained intact, and the losses included

General Prowse, Colonel the Hon. C. W. Palk of the Hampshires, Colonel Thicknesse of the Somersets, Colonel Wood of the Rifle Brigade, and Colonel Franklin of the 6th Warwicks, all killed; while Colonels Innes of the 8th Warwicks, Hopkinson of the Seaforths, and Green of the East Lancashires were wounded. For a long time a portion of the enemy's trench was held by mixed units, but it was of no value when detached from the rest and was abandoned in the evening. From the afternoon onwards no possible course save defence was open to General Lambton. There was considerable anxiety about one company of Irish Fusiliers who were in a detached portion of the German trench, but they succeeded in getting back next morning, bringing with them not only their wounded but some prisoners.

Immediately to the right of the Fourth Division was the Twenty-ninth Division<sup>1</sup> from Gallipoli, which rivalled in its constancy and exceeded in its losses its comrades upon the left. The 86th Brigade and the 87th formed the first line, with the 88th in support.

The van of the attack upon the right of the division was formed by the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Welsh Borderers, while the van upon the left was formed by the 2nd Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. The other battalions of the

<sup>1</sup> Since the constituents of this famous regular Division have not been given in full (as has been done with their comrades in preceding volumes) they are here enumerated as they were on July 1, 1916:

*86th Brigade.*—2nd Royal Fusiliers, 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st Dublin Fusiliers, 16th Middlesex.

*87th Brigade.*—1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st South Wales Borderers, 1st Scottish Borderers, 1st Border Regiment.

*88th Brigade.*—1st Essex, 2nd Hants, 4th Worcesters, Newfoundland Regiment.



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brigades formed the supporting line, and two battalions of the 88th Brigade, the Essex and the Newfoundlanders, were also drawn into the fight, so that, as in the Fourth Division, only two battalions remained intact at the close, the nucleus upon which in each case a new division had to be formed.

Upon the explosion of the great mine already mentioned two platoons of the 2nd Royal Fusiliers with machine-guns and Stokes mortars rushed forward to seize the crater. They got the near lip, but the enemy were already in possession of the far side, and no farther advance could be made. At this point, and indeed at nearly all points down the line, the wire was found to have been very thoroughly cut by the artillery fire, but for some reason our own wire had not been cut to the same extent and was a serious obstacle to our own advance.

Parties of the leading regiments were speedily up to the German front-line trench, but their advance beyond it was delayed by the fact that the dug-outs were found to be full of lurking soldiers who had intended no doubt to rush out and attack the stormers in the rear, as in the case of the Forty-sixth and Fifty-sixth Divisions in the north, but who were discovered in time and had to fight for their lives. These men were cleared out upon the right, and the advance then made some progress, but on the left by 9 o'clock the 86th Brigade had been completely held up by a murderous machine-gun fire in front of Beaumont Hamel, a position which, as already explained, presented peculiar difficulties. The Essex and Newfoundland men of the 88th Brigade were ordered forward and charged with such splendid resolution that the advance was carried forward again, and the

whole situation changed for the better. By 10.15 the casualties had become so great, however, through the fire of flanking machine-guns, that it was clear that the attack could not possibly reach its objective. The huge crater left by the explosion of the Beaumont Hamel mine was held for hours as a redoubt, but it also was enfiladed by fire and became untenable. By half-past ten the action had resolved itself into a bombardment of the German front line once more, and the assault had definitely failed. There was an attempt to renew it, but when it was found that the 86th Brigade and the 87th Brigade were equally reduced in numbers, it was recognised that only a defensive line could be held. It is true that the Divisional General had the Worcesters and the Hants still in hand, and was prepared to attack with them, but a further loss might have imperilled the Divisional line, so no advance was allowed.

All the troops of the Twenty-ninth Division had lived up to their fame, but a special word should be said of the Newfoundlanders, who, in their first action, kept pace with the veterans beside them. This battalion of fishermen, lumbermen, and farmers proved once more the grand stuff which is bred over the sea—the stuff which Bernhardt dismissed in a contemptuous paragraph. “They attacked regardless of loss, moving forward in extended order, wave behind wave. It was a magnificent exhibition of disciplined courage.” Well might General Hunter-Weston say next day after visiting the survivors: “To hear men cheering as they did, after undergoing such an experience, and in the midst of such mud and rain, made one proud to have the command of such a battalion.” The losses of the Newfoundlanders

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were severe. Losses are always the index of the sorrow elsewhere, but when they fall so heavily upon a small community, where every man plays a vital part and knows his neighbour, they are particularly distressing. From Cape Race to the coast of Labrador there was pride and mourning over that day. The total losses of the division were heavy, and included Colonels Pierce and Ellis of the Inniskillings and Borderers.

It must have been with a heavy heart that General Hunter-Weston realised, with the approach of night, that each of his divisions had met with such losses that the renewal of the attack was impossible. He, his Divisional Commanders, his officers and his men had done both in their dispositions and in their subsequent actions everything which wise leaders and brave soldiers could possibly accomplish. If a criticism could be advanced it would be that the attack was urged with such determined valour that it would not take No until long after No was the inevitable answer. But grim persistence has won many a fight, and no leader who is worthy to lead can ever have an excess of it. They were up against the impossible, as were their companions to right and left. It is easy to recognise it now, but it could not be proved until it had been tested to the uttermost. Could other tactics, other equipment, other methods of guarding the soldiers have brought them across the fatal open levels? It may be so, and can again only be tried by testing. But this at least was proved for all time, that, given clear ground, unshaken troops, prepared positions, and ample artillery, no human fire and no human hardihood can ever hope to break such a defensive line. It should be added that here as



elsewhere the British artillery, though less numerous than it became at a later date, was admirable both in its heavy and in its lighter pieces. Observers have recorded that under its hammer blows the German trenches kept momentarily changing their shape, while the barrage was as thick and accurate and the lifting as well-timed as could have been wished. There was no slackness anywhere, either in preparation or in performance, and nothing but the absolute impossibility of the task under existing conditions stood in the way of success.

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### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Tenth and Third Corps, July 1, 1916

Magnificent conduct of the Ulster Division—Local success but general failure—Advance of Thirty-second Division—Advance of Eighth Division—Advance of Thirty-fourth Division—The turning-point of the line.

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MORLAND'S Tenth Corps consisted of the Thirty-sixth, Forty-ninth, and Thirty-second Divisions. It lay between Hunter-Weston's Eighth Corps upon the left and Pulteney's Third Corps upon the right. It covered a front from a mile north of Hamel to a mile north of Ovillers. At its northern end it was cut by the river Ancre, a sluggish canalised stream, running between two artificial dykes which the Germans periodically cut by their artillery fire and the British mended as best they might. This sector of attack, together with the one farther south which faced the Third Corps, presented peculiar difficulties to the assailants, as the ground sloped upward to the strong village of Thiepval with the ridge behind it, from which German guns could sweep the whole long glaciis of approach. Nowhere were there more gallant efforts for a decision and nowhere were they more hopeless.

The division to the north of the Tenth Corps was the Thirty-sixth Ulster Division. This division was composed of magnificent material, for the blend of Scot and Celt to be found in the North of Ireland produces a soldier who combines the fire of the one with the solidity of the other. These qualities have been brought to a finer temper by the atmosphere of opposition in which they have lived, and the difficult economical circumstances which they have overcome in so remarkable a way. Long ago in unhappy civil strife they had shown their martial qualities, and now upon a nobler and wider stage they were destined to confirm them. It might well seem invidious to give the palm to any one of the bands of heroes who shed their blood like water on the slopes of Picardy, but at least, all soldiers would agree that among them all there was not one which could at its highest claim more than equality of achievement that day with the men of Ulster.

The objective of this division was the German position from Beaucourt-sur-Ancre on the north to the northern edge of Thiepval. When the signal was given the two leading brigades, the 108th and the 107th, came away at a deliberate pace which quickened into the rush of a released torrent, and went roaring over the German trenches. "They were like bloodhounds off the leash." Like every one else they were horribly scourged by shrapnel and machine-fire as they rushed across, but whether it was that some curve in the ground favoured part of their line, or whatever the cause, they suffered less than the other divisions, and struck on to the German front line with their full shattering momentum, going through it as though it were paper. The 108th

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Brigade, consisting of the 9th Irish Fusiliers and the 11th, 12th, and 13th Irish Rifles, was on the left. Two of these, the Fusiliers and one of the Irish Rifle battalions, were on the north side of the Ancre, and were acting rather with the Twenty-ninth Division upon their left than with their own comrades on the right. This detachment fought all day side by side with the regulars, made their way at one time right up to Beaucourt Station, and had finally to retire to their own trenches together with the rest of the line north of the Ancre. Next morning the survivors crossed the Ancre, and from then onwards the Eighth Corps extended so as to take over this ground.

South of the Ancre the two remaining battalions of the 108th Brigade, and the whole of the 107th Brigade, consisting of the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 15th Irish Rifles, advanced upon a front of 3000 yards. The men had lost very heavily in the assembly trenches, and two companies of the 10th Irish Rifles had dwindled to two platoons before ever they got clear of the shattered wood in which they gathered. None the less, the fire and fury of their onset was terrific and sustained. "The place was covered with smoke and the explosion of heavy shells," says one who saw the scene from a front observation post. "I felt that no attack was possible, when suddenly out of the clouds I saw men advancing as if on parade, quite slowly. It seemed impossible, and yet they went on, stormed at on the left by high explosive and shrapnel, and on the right by enfilade machine-gun fire. Suddenly they charged, and when I could next see through the clouds on the slope (less than a mile away) I saw that they had taken the front trench, and in another minute the trench behind was taken,

as our fellows shouting, 'No surrender!' got through—God knows how! As they advanced the fire of the guns became more and more enfilade, but nothing could stop their steady progress."

The long line of Irish Riflemen had rolled over every obstacle, and although their dead and wounded lay thick behind them they still stormed forwards with the same fury with which they started. Bunching up into platoons in artillery formation they pushed on and carried the third line. Ahead of them, across a considerable interval, was a fourth line, with a large redoubt upon the flank. They steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then dashing onwards once again they captured both the fourth line and the redoubt. So far forward were they now that they had reached regions north of Thiepval which were never trodden by a British foot again until three months of constant fighting had cleared a way to them. It was the great Schwaben Redoubt which was now before them. The reserve brigade, the 109th, consisting of the 9th, 10th, and 11th Inniskilling Fusiliers, with the 14th Irish Rifles, had dashed forward at 10.40, leaving only the pioneer battalion, the 16th Irish Rifles, to guard the trenches. With the additional weight of the survivors of this reinforcing line the fringe of stormers, for they were now a fringe and nothing more, again rushed forward and threw themselves into the Schwaben trenches. This was their limit, and for most of them their grave. They had no further supports, no ammunition could reach them, and they were embedded in the depths of the German line at a point far deeper than any unit upon the left of the line had attained. The village of Thiepval commanded them from their right rear.

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Some remained in little groups, huddling in some coign of vantage, and fighting to the last cartridge, absolutely refusing to take one step to the rear. To the Germans they were as dangerous as so many cornered wolves. Others fell back in orderly fashion, but not an inch farther than was needful, for they held on all day to the frontage taken by them. The first two lines were kept in their fierce grip till nightfall of the next day, when they handed them over to the relieving division.

In this splendid deed of arms the Thirty-sixth Division left half its number upon the battlefield. The instances of gallantry were innumerable, and so equally distributed that their General, when asked to name a special battalion, could only answer that the whole twelve had done equally well. Had the divisions to right and left been able to get as far, the whole gain would have been permanent. As it was, 540 prisoners were brought in, and few were lost save the wounded, chief of whom was Colonel Craig, who directed the movements of his men long after he was unable to direct his own. Colonel Bernard of the 10th Rifles, Captain Davidson, who worked his machine-gun after his leg was shattered, Captain Gaffikin, who died while leading his company with an orange handkerchief waving in his hand, are but a few of the outstanding names. The pressure upon the different brigades is indicated by the losses in officers of the 107th, the 108th, and the 109th.

A very detailed account would be necessary to bring home to the reader the full gallantry of this deed of arms. Experienced soldiers who saw it were moved to the limit of human speech. "I wish I had



been born an Ulsterman," cried one of them. "But I am proud to have been associated with these wonderful men." To have penetrated all alone for two miles into the German line, and to withdraw from such a salient in military order, holding fast to all that could be retained, was indeed a great feat for any troops to have performed. The requiem for their fallen was best expressed by one of the survivors, who wrote that "they died for the cause of Liberty, Honour, and Freedom, for the Old Flag, the emblem of Britain, died for Ireland, died for Ulster!"

The Thirty-second Division was on the immediate right of the men of Ulster. Their advance was carried out with the 96th Brigade on the left, the 97th upon the right, and the 14th in support. The reader may be warned that from this time onwards he will often find, as in this case, that old brigades have been added to new formations, so that the former simplicity of numbering is often disturbed. The storming lines went forward in each case with two battalions abreast in front and two in succession in support. The front line of attack taken from the north, or left, consisted of the 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, 16th Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 16th and 17th Highland Light Infantry. Of these four battalions the 16th Northumberland Fusiliers came under very heavy fire, and were unable to press their attack home. On the right the Highlanders had crawled up to within a hundred yards of the Leipzig salient and were into it with a rush the moment that the barrage lifted. The 15th Lancashire Fusiliers upon the left made a particularly brilliant advance. The right company was held up in front of Thiepval village, but the left company swept on with the Thirty-sixth Division,

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keeping pace with their magnificent advance. It appears to have reached the east end of Thiepval, but there it was buried deeply in the enemy's position and was never heard of again. The supporting battalions of the 96th Brigade, the 16th Lancashire Fusiliers and the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, tried hard to regain touch with their lost comrades, but in vain. These various gallant bodies who, at different points of our line, pushed forward into impossible positions, were no doubt for the greater part killed or wounded, but from among them came the 850 prisoners whom the Germans claimed to have taken on the northern part of the line on that day. The left of the divisional line was so weakened by these losses that they were compelled to withdraw to their own front trenches.

On the right, however, the Highlanders were able to hold on to a part of the Leipzig salient. The losses, however, upon this flank had been very heavy, not only in the front wave, but among the 1st Dorsets and the 11th Borders as they came out from a wood in support. Coming under a concentrated fire of machine-guns, these two battalions suffered heavily. Colonel Machell, gallantly leading his Borders, was shot dead, his adjutant, Lieutenant Gordon, was badly wounded as he stooped over his body, Major Diggle was wounded, and the greater number of the officers were on the ground. Colonel Machell, it may be remarked, was a high civil official of the Egyptian Government, Under Secretary for the Interior, whose patriotism had led him to join the New Armies and thus to meet his death upon the field of battle. The 1st Dorsets lost nearly as heavily as the men of the Border; their leader, Major Shute, was disabled, and their ranks thrown into temporary

confusion. They were splendidly rallied, however, by the adjutant, who led them on and succeeded with the survivors in reaching the Leipzig Redoubt. Colonel Laidlaw, of the 16th Highland Light Infantry, had also been wounded, the third commanding officer killed or injured on this wing of the attack.

There had been no flinching anywhere, and the military virtue shown had been of the highest possible quality; but the losses from the machine-guns and from the barrage were so heavy that they deprived the attack of the weight and momentum necessary to win their way through the enemy's position. Under the desperate circumstances, it might well be considered a remarkable result that a stretch of the Leipzig Redoubt should be won and permanently held by the Highlanders, especially by the 17th Highland Light Infantry. The sappers had prepared a Russian sap running up to the enemy line, and this was invaluable as a communication trench. On the 2nd and 3rd the enemy endeavoured to turn out the intruders, but the 2nd Manchesters and 15th Highland Light Infantry not only held their ground, but enlarged it. On the night of the 3rd the division was relieved by the Twenty-fifth Division and withdrew to refit after its tragic but splendid exertions.

Out of the novel conditions of what may be called Bloch warfare certain rules and axioms are slowly evolving. That it is impossible without artificial protection to attack over the open against an unshaken enemy provided with machine-guns is the most certain. But there is another which might be formulated thus: If there are sharp salients in the enemy line, either these salients must be taken first or the attack must be made out of range of them,



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otherwise their guns must flank the whole advance. Very many examples might be quoted where the disregard of this axiom has brought disaster to either side. A conspicuous case would be that of the Third Corps now to be described, where the sinister salient of Thiepval protruded to the north, and a smaller but very efficient one to the south, so that the whole advance was conducted under the fire of two lines of guns which raked it from end to end. In addition the opposing infantry included a division of the Prussian Guard. In the whole long position there would appear to be no sector where there was less prospect of success, and yet there was no sector where it was more essential to hold the enemy fast, since victory might await us to the immediate south.

The Third Corps, under General Pulteney, occupied the front immediately to the east of Albert. This large town was almost exactly in the centre of its rear, and the important road from Albert to Bapaume bisected the British position. Ovillers to the north, within the German lines, and Bécourt to the south, in the British, marked roughly the two ends of the sector. It was a comparatively narrow stretch, so that only two divisions were in the firing line, and one in reserve. These were respectively the Eighth Regular Division to the north, the Thirty-fourth of the New Army to the south, and the Nineteenth, also of the New Army, in support.

Had the Thirty-second Division succeeded in holding its grip upon Thiepval upon the north, there might have been some chance of success, but as it was, the machine-guns from that quarter shaved the whole of No Man's Land as a mower may shave a lawn, and after the first rush, which

carried the brave fellows of the Eighth Division over the trenches, it proved to be absolutely impossible to send them either supports or supplies. The main body of this magnificent division disappeared into the smoke and haze of the battle, and their comrades in the trenches waited with aching hearts, their eyes fixed upon their front where the roar of battle rose from the other side of the pelting sleet of bullets. All day they waited, dashing out occasionally and being beaten back with ever-dwindling numbers. After dusk, they searched the shell-holes and brought in some 400 wounded. A few bewildered men came staggering in during the night, half-delirious with fatigue and strain, and unable themselves to say how they had got back across the enemy's front line from the depths to which they had penetrated.

This tragic but heroic attack in which the whole force who went forward fought literally to the death, was carried out in the following order :

On the right was the 23rd Brigade ; in the centre the 25th ; and on the left the 70th. The 23rd and 25th were the old hard-working units of Neuve Chapelle and many another fray. The 70th was a particularly fine brigade of the New Army. This division had up to the last moment been without a pioneer battalion, but the infantry had dug themselves particularly good assembly and communication trenches, which helped them much upon the day of battle. They had also, under the direction of the Commander of Divisional sappers, run two covered ways up to the enemy's trenches which might have been a vital factor in the day's work, had it not been that the stormers pushed on, leaving it to others to

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secure their gains. The result was that the advancing infantry passed rather than occupied the front trenches, the barrage cut off supports, the enemy emerged from their dug-outs, and the line still remained under their control, forbidding the use or even the disclosure of the covered ways, since men could not emerge in single file in an enemy trench.

Following the plan of describing operations always from the north, we will first picture from such reliable material as is available the attack of the 70th Brigade, which contained some of the finest North-country stuff that ever fought the battles of the country. This brigade was separated on the north by a clear space of about 300 yards from the Highland Light Infantry of the 97th Brigade, who formed the extreme right of the Thirty-second Division. The 8th York and Lancaster was the flank battalion, with the 8th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon its right. The 9th York and Lancaster were behind their comrades, and the 11th Sherwood Foresters behind the Light Infantry.

As it is impossible to give with any fulness the story of any one regiment, and as each may be taken as typical of the others, we may follow the front flank battalion on its advance. This, the 8th York and Lancaster, consisted almost entirely of miners, a class of men who have furnished grand military material to the New Armies. This unit came chiefly from the Rotherham district. The frontage of the battalion was 750 yards.

As the hour of attack approached, the enemy's counter-bombardment became so violent that there was the utmost difficulty in getting the men into the front-line trenches. Many were killed and even



buried before the advance had begun. When the whistles blew the stormers went forward in four waves with 50 yards between, the supporting battalions following instantly. The machine-guns were sweeping the ground and about 350 yards had to be covered between the lines. Officers and men went down in heaps under the enfilade fire from four lines of guns, one behind the other, in the Thiepval district. The approach was over a billiard-table glaucis with no cover of any kind. The ranks kept formation and trudged steadily forward, throwing themselves headlong into the front German trenches. There they steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then advancing once more sprang down into the second German line which was strongly held. Colonel Maddison had been shot down early in the attack. Captain Dawson, the adjutant, had been wounded, but staggered on with the men until he was killed at the second line of trenches. "Come on, boys! let's get at 'em and clear 'em out!" were his last words. On this second line the battalion, together with its support, beat itself to pieces. A few survivors unable to get back were taken prisoners, and a German report has stated that they were very proud and defiant when marched away. At night a number of wounded were carried in along the whole divisional front from No Man's Land, but many lives were lost in the gallant work, and many of the wounded also lost their lives in trying to crawl back, for the Germans turned their machine-guns during the daytime upon everything that moved in front of their lines.

To show how uniform was the experience, one may quote the doings of a battalion of the 23rd Brigade. This brigade was on the right of the Eighth Division

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line, and the 2nd Middlesex, the battalion in question, formed the right battalion joining on with the Tyne-side Scottish of the Thirty-fourth Division to the south. Upon its left was the 2nd Devons. The supporting troops, two companies of the 2nd West Yorkshires and the 2nd Scottish Rifles, seem to have been held back when it was seen how fatal was the advance, and so in part escaped from the catastrophe. The Middlesex advanced almost opposite to La Boisselle. There was a slight dip in the ground to the immediate front which formed a partial protection from the machine-guns, so that although the losses were very heavy, about 300 men with six Lewis guns made good their footing in the German front-line trench. Their gallant commander was wounded twice, but still kept at their head while they swept onwards to the second line. It was stuffed with Germans, but the handful of British stormers flung themselves in among them and cleared a standing place in the trench. The German guns, however, had the exact range, and four out of the six Lewis guns were blown into the air. Finally, only five men and a sergeant were left unwounded in this trench. This handful made its way back. One hundred and thirty of the Middlesex men seem to have got through or round on to the Pozières Road, but their fate was never cleared up. Finally, only 30 men of this grand battalion answered the roll-call that night.

The space between the two attacks described from the point of view of the two wing battalions of the division was occupied by the 25th Brigade, whose advance and losses were exactly similar to those which have been narrated. The 2nd Lincolns and 2nd Berkshires were the leading battalions, and their

devotion in attempting the impossible was as great as that of their comrades to right and left.

Both regiments suffered heavily, and it is probable that the Berkshires went deeper than any other. The 1st Irish Rifles had occupied the trenches for six days in dreadful weather, and had suffered heavily from the retaliatory bombardment of the Germans. They were therefore held in reserve, but none the less made repeated efforts and with great loss to cross the barrage and help their comrades, for which they afterwards received a special message of thanks from the Divisional Commander.

Up to this point the writer has been faced by the painful and monotonous task of one long record of failure from Gommecourt in the north to La Boisselle in the south. It cannot be doubted that we had over-estimated the effects of our bombardment, and that the German guns were intact to a degree which was unexpected. Our one consolation must be that the German reserves were held in their position, and that improved prospects were assured for the remainder of the British line and for the whole of the French line. Had the front of the battle covered only the region which has been treated up to now, the episode would have been a tragic one in British military history. Thousands of men had fallen, nor could it be truthfully said that anything of permanence had been achieved. Next day the remains of the Eighth Division were withdrawn, the 70th Brigade was restored to the Twenty-third Division, to which it rightfully belonged, and the Twelfth Division came forward to fill the gap in the line, helped by the gunners and sappers of the Eighth, who remained at their posts until July 4.



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On the right of the Eighth Division was the Thirty-fourth, a unit which consisted of one mixed English and Scotch Brigade ; while the other two were raised respectively from the Tyneside Irish and from the Tyneside Scots, hardy and martial material from the coalpits and foundries of the North. They attacked upon the front between the Albert-Bapaume Road on the north and the village of Bécourt on the south. The idea was to storm La Boisselle village, and to push the attack home both north and south of it upon Contalmaison, which lay behind it. Immediately before the assault two great mines were blown, one of which, containing the unprecedented amount of 60,000 lbs. of gun-cotton, threw hundreds of tons of chalk into the air. Within a few minutes of the explosion the Thirty-fourth Division were out of their trenches and advancing in perfect order upon the German trenches. The 101st Brigade, consisting of the 15th and 16th Royal Scots, the 10th Lincolns, and 11th Suffolks, were on the right, the Tyneside Scots upon the left, and the Tyneside Irish in support behind the right brigade. In the immediate rear lay the Nineteenth Division with instructions to hold and consolidate the ground gained.

In no part of the line was the advance more gallant, and it marks the point at which unalloyed failure began first to change to partial success, ripening into complete victory in the southern section. Some slight cover seems to have helped the troops for the first few hundred yards, and it would appear also that though the small-arm fire was very severe, the actual shell-fire was not so heavy as that which devastated the divisions in the north. None the less, the obstacles were sufficient to test to the highest any

troops in the world, and they were gloriously surmounted by men, none of whom had been in action before. "I, their commander," wrote the Divisional General, "will never forget their advance through the German curtain of fire. It was simply wonderful, and they behaved like veterans." The scream of the war-pipes, playing "The Campbells are coming," warmed the blood of the soldiers. Upon the left, the Tyneside Scots penetrated two lines of trenches and found themselves to the north of the village of La Boisselle, where further progress was made impossible by a murderous fire from front and flank. Of the four battalions of the 101st Brigade, the two English units were nearly opposite the village, and though they advanced with great resolution, they were unable to get a permanent lodgment. The two Royal Scots battalions upon the flank got splendidly forward, and some of them made their way deeper into the German line than any organised body of troops, save only the Ulster men, had succeeded in doing, getting even as far as the outskirts of Contalmaison. The valiant leader of the advanced party of the 15th Royal Scots was wounded, but continued to encourage his men and to try to consolidate his desperate position, which was nearly a mile within the German lines. He was again severely wounded, and Lieutenant Hole was killed, upon which the only remaining officer fell back to a point some hundreds of yards westward, called Round Wood or Round Alley. Here the Scots stuck fast, and nothing could budge them. Germans were in front of them, were in La Boisselle upon their left rear, and were behind them in the trenches, which led from the village. By all the laws of war, the detachment was

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destroyed ; but in practice the Germans found that they could not achieve it. A small reinforcement of the 27th Northumberland Fusiliers (from the 103rd Brigade), under an experienced soldier, had joined them, and their situation was less forlorn because they were in slight touch with the skirts of the 64th Brigade of the Twenty-first Division, who had also, as will presently be shown, won a very forward position. By means of this division communication was restored with the isolated detachment, and the colonel of the 16th Royal Scots, a very well-known volunteer officer of Edinburgh, succeeded in reaching his men. His advent gave them fresh spirit, and under his leadership they proceeded next morning not only to hold the position, but to enlarge it considerably, sending bombers down every sap and endeavouring to give the impression of great numbers. Two companies of the East Lancashire Regiment from the Nineteenth Division made their way forward, and joined with effect in these attacks. This small body of men held their own until the afternoon of July 3, when the advance of the Nineteenth Division upon La Boisselle enabled them to be relieved. It was time, for the water was exhausted and munitions were running low. It was a glad moment when, with their numerous German captives, they joined up with their cheering comrades. It should be said that in this fine feat of arms a small party of the 11th Suffolks played a valiant part. General Pulteney issued a special order thanking these troops for their stout defence, and the matter was in truth of wider importance than any local issue, for it had the effect of screening the left flank of the Twenty-first Division, enabling them to make



good their hold upon Crucifix Trench and the Sunken Road, as will now be told.

Before leaving the Thirty-fourth Division it should be said that although La Boisselle remained untaken, the Tyneside Scots and Irish carried a number of trenches and returned with many prisoners. It has been the universal experience of our soldiers that the Germans, though excellent with their guns, and very handy with their bombs, are wanting in that spice of devilry called for in bayonet work—a quality which their ally the Turk possesses to a marked degree. In this instance, as in many others, when the Tyneside men swept roaring into the trenches the Germans either fled or threw up their hands. The condition of the prisoners was unexpectedly good. “They have new uniforms, new brown boots, leggings, and are as fat as butter,” said one spectator, which is at great variance with descriptions from other parts of the line.

We have now completed our survey of that long stretch of line in which our gallant advance was broken against an equally gallant resistance. The account has necessarily had to concern itself with incessant details of units and orders of battle, since these are the very essence of such an account, and without them it might read, as contemporary descriptions did read, like some vague combat in the moon. But, casting such details aside, the reader can now glance up that long line and see the wreckage of that heroic disaster—the greatest and also the most glorious that ever befell our arms.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Attack of the Fifteenth and Thirteenth Corps,  
July 1, 1916

The advance of the Twenty-first Division—64th Brigade—First permanent gains—50th Brigade at Fricourt—Advance of Seventh Division—Capture of Mametz—Fine work by Eighteenth Division—Capture of Montauban by the Thirtieth Division—General view of the battle—Its decisive importance.

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IMMEDIATELY to the south of Pulteney's Third Corps, and extending from Bécourt in the north to a point opposite Fricourt village, lay Horne's Fifteenth Corps. The general task of this Corps was to attack Mametz on the right, contain Fricourt in the centre, and attack between there and La Boisselle towards Mametz Wood. It consisted of the Twenty-first, the Seventh, and the Seventeenth Divisions. Of these, the most northerly was the Twenty-first, that fine North-country division which had so terrible an ordeal when it came up in support upon the second day of Loos. Those who held that in spite of defeat its conduct upon that occasion was soldierly, were borne out by its achievement on the Somme, where it made a lodgment in the enemy's line upon the first

day, and did good service at later stages of the battle. Let us now turn our attention to its advance. It may first be mentioned that the units were the same as those enumerated in the description of Loos, save that in each brigade one regular battalion had been substituted. Thus the 1st Lincolns, 4th Middlesex, and 1st East Yorks took the place of the 8th East Yorks, 12th West Yorks, and 14th Durhams respectively. The 50th Brigade of the Seventeenth Division was attached to the Twenty-first Division for the purpose of the attack, and will be included with it in this summary of the operations. The rest of the Seventeenth Division was in reserve.

The attack was on a three-brigade front, the 64th Brigade upon the north, just south of La Boisselle, and in close touch with the Thirty-fourth Division. To the right of the 64th was the 63rd Brigade, and to the right of that the 50th, which advanced straight upon Fricourt. The 62nd Brigade was in reserve. It will be best to deal with the attack of the 64th Brigade with some detail, as its exploits had a very direct bearing upon the issue of the battle.

This brigade advanced upon the signal with the 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon the left in touch with the Royal Scots of the 101st Brigade. On their right was their 9th namesake battalion. Behind them in immediate support were the 1st East Yorks (left) and 15th Durhams (right). The advance was greatly helped by the formation of a Russian sap between the lines on which the front companies could assemble. It was found, however, upon the men advancing that the fire was so severe that they could only get forward by crawling from hole to hole, with the result that the barrage lifted



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before they could reach the front trenches, and the Germans were able to mount the parapet and slate them with rifle-fire. Colonel Lynch of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry was killed by a shell between trenches, as were all four captains, but the men stuck to their work and finally the leading battalions swept over the German lines, which had been greatly disorganised by the artillery, and they killed or captured the occupants with no very severe resistance. Two fixed points lay in front of the brigade, which were part of the definite objectives of the division. The first was a sunken road 1100 yards from the British front, the second was a trench 400 yards farther, on which, by the irony of Fate, a large wayside crucifix looked down, so that it was called Crucifix Trench. Beyond these on the left front were several shattered woods, Shelter Wood and Birch-tree Wood, which gave the enemy good cover, and to the right was a large ruined building, Fricourt Farm, which raked the advance with its snipers and machine-guns.

On passing the front German line the successive British waves lost their formation and clubbed together, so that a long loose line of Yorkshire and Durham men scrambled onwards into, out of and over the successive impediments, beating down all resistance as they went. When the fire became too hot, the men crawled forwards upon their stomachs or made short sharp rushes from one shell-hole to another, but the advance was steady and unbroken. The smoke from the shells was as dense as a Scotch mist. Every now and then through the haze the flashes of a machine-gun would be spied and possibly the vague figures of the German gunners as they swept it across in their deadly traverse, but a rush of

furious infantry put each in turn out of action. The evidence seems to be conclusive that some at least of these gunners were found to be chained to their guns, which may well have happened at their own request, as a visible proof that they would never desert their post. They fired up to the last instant, and naturally they received no quarter from the stormers. Now and again the ragged line of men would stumble suddenly upon a section of proper trench, would spring down into it, clear up the occupants, and then sit in flushed, hard-breathing groups until a whistle from the officer and a cheer from their comrades would call them on once more.

In this sector there appears, however, to have been a systematic, if superficial, examination of the dug-outs before a trench was passed. One does not hear of those surprise attacks from the rear which were so common and so fatal to the north. The examination usually took the form of a sharp summons at the mouth of the burrow, quickly followed—if there were no response—by a Mills bomb. Then, as often as not, there would crawl out of the black orifice eight or ten terrified and bleeding men, who would join the numerous small convoys trailing backwards to the rear. These prisoners were nearly all from the 110th and 111th Reserve Bavarian Regiments, and the alacrity with which they made for the rear with their hands above their heads, formed the only comic touch in a tragic day. One made a grab for a rifle. “He lived about five seconds,” says the narrator. “They were thin, unshaven, and terrified,” says an officer, talking of the particular batch he handled. “Most had dark hair—a very different type from the Prussians.”

Having overrun the German trenches, the infantry

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were now faced with a considerable stretch of open which lay between them and the Sunken Road, leading from Fricourt to Contalmaison. Many were hit upon this perilous passage. A subsidiary line of German trenches lay in front of this road, and into this the British tumbled. The colonel of the 15th Durhams was the senior officer who had got up, and he took command at this point, rallying the weary men of all four battalions for a fresh advance. A few of the Royal Scots of the Thirty-fourth Division were found already in possession, the fringe of that body who have previously been described as making so invaluable a stand at Round Wood.

At this point the 64th Brigade was found to be some distance in front of the main body of the Thirty-fourth Division on the left, and of their comrades on the right, so that they could get no farther for the moment without their flanks being badly exposed. In front through the haze they could dimly see the Crucifix which was their ultimate objective. The men had to cower low, for the bullets were coming in a continuous stream from Fricourt Farm on the right and from the woods on the left. The Sunken Road was ten or twelve feet deep at the spot, and though it was exposed at the sides, by rapid digging the men got some cover, though many dropped before they could make a shelter. Here the survivors of the advance waited for some hours, spending some of the time in ransacking the enormous thirty-foot deep dug-outs which the Germans had excavated at certain points along the side of the road. Into these the wounded were conveyed, and refreshed by the good things of life, from Seltzer-water to gold-tipped cigarettes, which were found within.



In the afternoon the General Officer Commanding had come up as far as the Sunken Road, and had examined the position for himself. The 63rd Brigade was now well forward upon the right and the advance could be resumed. It was pushed swiftly onwards and Crucifix Trench was occupied, nearly a mile from the British front line. A lieutenant of the 9th Yorkshires, though wounded by shrapnel, seems to have been the first to lead a party into this advanced trench, but soon it was strongly occupied. The pressing need was to consolidate it, for it was swept by gusts of fire from both flanks. Another lieutenant of the Yorkshires, also a wounded man, took over the direction, and the men, with very little cover, worked splendidly to strengthen the position. Their numbers were so reduced that a counter-attack would have been most serious, but the splendid support given by the artillery held the German infantry at a distance. A few of the British tried to advance upon Shelter Wood, but the machine-guns were too active and they had to fall back or lie in shell-holes until after dark, only seventeen out of sixty getting back.

A captain of the 10th Yorkshires took over the advanced command and sent back to the colonel of the Durhams, who had meantime been wounded at the Sunken Road, to ask for instructions. The answer was to hold on and that help was at hand. This help was in the form of the 62nd Reserve Brigade, the leading battalions of which, the 1st Lincolns and 10th Yorkshire Regiment, came swinging splendidly across the open and flung themselves into Crucifix Trench. From that time the maintenance of the ground was assured. The men of the 64th Brigade who had done so finely were

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drawn back into the Sunken Road, having fully secured their objective. One cannot but marvel here, as so often elsewhere, at the fine work done by young subalterns when the senior officers have been disabled. A lieutenant of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry found himself in command of the whole battalion at the most critical moment of the engagement, and on leaving could only hand it over to a brother subaltern, who carried on with equal courage and ability. The brigade was drawn back to the German first line, where it lay for forty-eight hours, and finally acted as reserve brigade to the successful advance undertaken by the 62nd Brigade, by which Shelter Wood was captured on July 3.

Such, in some detail, were the adventures of the 64th Brigade, which may be taken as parallel to those of the 63rd upon the right, who were faced by much the same obstacles, having the Sunken Road ahead and the Fricourt houses upon their right. The 8th Somersets were on the left in touch with the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry, and supported by the 8th Lincolns. On the right were the 4th Middlesex and the 10th York and Lancasters. They were able to get well up to Fricourt Farm upon the left of the village, but the ground was unfavourable and they never got as far forward as their comrades on the left. Of the German resistance on this front, it can be said that it was worthy of the reputation which the Bavarians have won in the War. The men were of splendid physique and full of courage. They fought their machine-guns to the last. All was ready for a vigorous advance next morning. The artillery of the Twenty-first Division, which has won a name

for exceptional efficiency, was up nearly level with the infantry at 10 P.M. that night, a road having been laid in that time from the original gun position to a point half a mile inside the German front line.

On the immediate right of the 63rd Brigade, in front of Fricourt, was the 50th Brigade (Glasgow), to which was assigned the task of attacking the village while the Twenty-first Division got part of it upon the north. The brigade advanced gallantly, the front line consisting of two fine Yorkshire battalions, the 10th West Yorks and the 7th East Yorks, with part of the 7th Yorkshires. The attack reached and partly occupied the front trenches, but the fire and the losses were both very heavy, the 10th West Yorkshires being specially hard hit. The survivors behaved with great gallantry, and some of them held on all day, though surrounded by enemies. In the afternoon a second advance was made by Yorkshires and East Yorkshires, with 6th Dorsets in support, but again the losses were heavy and no solid foothold could be got in the village. When dusk fell some of the troops who had held their own all day were able to get back to the British trenches bringing prisoners with them. A notable example is that of a lieutenant of the West Yorks, who managed to stagger back with three wounds upon him and three Germans in front of him. The 51st Brigade was brought up in the evening to continue the assault, but with the morning of the 2nd it was found that the work had been done, and that the advance upon both flanks had caused the evacuation of the village.

The line of trenches takes a very peculiar turn just south of Fricourt, which is shown in the diagram of the battle, so that the attack of the Seventh

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Division, which was the next in the line, was from almost due south, whilst all the others had been from due west. The project was that a holding attack to engage the defenders should be made upon Mametz, whilst the remaining divisions in the line, the Seventh of the Fifteenth Corps, with the Eighteenth and Thirtieth of the Thirteenth Corps, should advance upon the line Mametz-Montauban. Their success would obviously make the position both of Fricourt and of Mametz impossible, the more so if the Twenty-first Division could maintain its position at the Sunken Road to the north of Fricourt. This was the calculation, and it worked to perfection, so that both these villages fell eventually into our hands with a minimum loss of life to the assailants. Every honour is due to the leaders who devised and to the soldiers who carried out the scheme, but it should at the same time be understood that in the case of these southern divisions, and also of the French Army of General Foch upon the right, they were attacking a portion of the line which was far less organised, and manned by very inferior troops to those in the north. All this section of attack seems to have been a complete surprise to the Germans.

The famous Seventh Division was now commanded by one of the three Brigadiers who had led it during its heroic days at Ypres. Its units, however, had changed considerably, and the 91st Brigade had taken the place of the 21st. This Brigade, consisting partly of Manchester battalions and partly of old units of the Seventh Division (2nd Queen's Surrey, 1st South Staffords, 21st and 22nd Manchesters), attacked upon the right, while the 20th Brigade advanced upon the left, having the 2nd Gordons and 9th

Devons in the van, with the 8th Devons and 2nd Borders in support. The front trenches were overrun without much difficulty. The order of battle was the 22nd Manchesters upon the right with the 1st South Staffords in close support. In the centre were the 2nd Gordons and upon their left the 9th Devons. The right got forward with comparatively small losses and overran the front German line. The Gordons had their left company held up by uncut wire, but got forward none the less with considerable losses. The 9th Devons were the most exposed and suffered very severely, but in spite of a casualty list which included half the officers and men, they never winced or wavered for an instant, showing what had been often shown before, that the spirit of old days still lives in the country of Drake and of Raleigh. The survivors seized and held Tirpitz Trench. The 2nd Borders had also seized Danube Support, and the whole front line was in British hands.

The 91st Brigade were now closing in upon the right of Mametz village and had entered Danzig Alley, from which they were for a time driven by a brisk counter-attack. The 1st South Staffords had won their way into the outskirts of Mametz, but the losses were heavy, and half of the 21st Manchesters came racing up to reinforce. At one o'clock the Danzig Alley had again been occupied by the Manchesters. Half the 2nd Warwicks were sent up to reinforce the Gordons and the line of infantry dashed forward upon the village, 600 of the enemy throwing up their hands in front of them. The 20th Manchesters also advanced, losing heavily by the fire from Fricourt, but pushing on as far as the Sunken Road on the extreme left of the advance. There is a tangle of

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trenches at this point, the chief of which is the Rectangle, but with the aid of the 1st Welsh Fusiliers they were all cleared and the flank of the Division made good, and consolidated, since it had advanced farther than the troops to the left. In the morning however, when it was found that Fricourt had been evacuated, the whole division was able to get forward and by July 3 had occupied Bottom Wood, while the 2nd Royal Irish had actually penetrated Mametz Wood, taking 2 guns and 50 prisoners. Some days later, Mametz Wood had become a different proposition, but the general orders at the time were that it should not be seriously attacked.

Altogether in these Mametz operations the Seventh Division took 1500 prisoners, seven field-guns, and much booty of different kinds.

We have now recorded in succession the repulse of the Seventh Corps at Gommecourt, that of the Eighth Corps at Serre and Beaumont Hamel, and that of the Tenth Corps at Thiepval. The record of heroic disaster was then alleviated by the partial success of the Third Corps at La Boisselle, the considerable success of the Fifteenth Corps at Mametz, and now by the complete success of the Thirteenth Corps at Montauban. South of this point along the whole French line the victory was never in doubt. These latter operations do not come within the direct scope of this narrative, though some short account must be given of them later, in order to co-ordinate the results of the two wings of the Allied Armies.

The Thirteenth Corps was commanded by General Congreve, who, it will be remembered, gained his V.C. in the affair of the guns where young Roberts met his death at Colenso. It consisted of the



Eighteenth, the Thirtieth, and the Ninth Divisions of the New Army. Of these the Eighteenth was on the left in touch with the victorious Seventh, the Thirtieth was on the right in touch with the French, and the Ninth, the Scottish Division which had done such great work at Loos, was in reserve.

The Eighteenth Division, which had done no serious fighting before, established a remarkable record for good service during the whole course of the Somme battle, into which it was thrust again and again, never without leaving its mark. It was entirely an English division. Some complex and successful trench-digging had been done on this part of the front. Eight covered saps had been driven forward and reached a point within twenty yards of the German trenches without their knowledge. Upon the advance being ordered the ends of these were opened up, machine-guns and flame-throwers were thrust through, and the saps behind were quickly unroofed and turned into communication trenches. It was a variant of the device adopted in the Eighth Division, and was superior to it in that its success did not depend upon the actual capture of the trench.

The front of the attack was about 2500 yards, and it was carried out by three brigades abreast, each covering about 700 yards. Each brigade had two battalions in front, one in support and one in reserve. Each was also allotted its own particular artillery apart from the general divisional artillery. There are many good arguments for such a formation of divisional attack, as compared with the two-brigades-in-front and one-in-the-rear formation. Upon this occasion, at any rate, it worked very smoothly. The objectives were from the immediate

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western end of Montauban upon the right, along Montauban Alley to a point east of Mametz where they should touch the right units of the Seventh Division.

Of the three brigades the 55th was on the right, the 53rd in the centre, and the 54th on the left. In accordance with the general scheme of description we will begin with the latter.

The 54th Brigade had the 7th Bedford on the right, the 11th Royal Fusiliers on the left, the 6th Northants in support, and the 12th Middlesex in reserve. As they rushed forward they faced a feeble barrage, but a heavy machine-gun fire. It was found, however, here, and along the whole divisional front, that the German wire was utterly destroyed, thanks largely to the work of the trench mortars which had supplanted field-guns for this particular purpose. The first trenches were taken without a pause, and parties remained behind to clear out the dug-outs.

"Cowering in the trench," says one of the stormers, "clad in the pale grey uniforms we had longed for twelve months to see, unarmed and minus equipment, with fear written on their faces, were a few of those valiant warriors of the Kaiser whose prowess we were out to dispute. Here let me say that the exact moment selected for our attack had taken the Huns by surprise. This view was subsequently confirmed by prisoners, who said that they had expected us earlier in the day and had since stood down." This idea of a surprise only refers of course to the front trench. Soon the fighting grew very severe.

The first serious check was in front of a strong

point called the Pommiers Redoubt. The wire here had been invisible from long grass so that its presence was a surprise. Again and again the machine-guns swept away the leading files of the attack. The redoubt could be outflanked, however, and an officer of the Fusiliers brought his bombers round and eventually to the rear of it. Snipers held him for a time, but they were rushed by an officer and a few men. The Germans still held bravely to their point, but Bedfords and Fusiliers swarmed in upon them until their arms went down and their hands up. From this strong point bombing parties were sent down the communication trenches, the infantry following closely and occupying the new ground.

The brigade was now in some danger from its own success, for it had outrun the 91st Brigade of the Seventh Division upon its left, and its own comrades of the 53rd Brigade upon its right. The 6th Northants held the defensive flank on the left. Later in the day the 53rd came into line upon the right, and before dark the 54th was able to move on again with little resistance until it had reached its full objective at Montauban Alley.

The 53rd Brigade was on the right of the 54th. Its assaulting line was formed by the 8th Norfolk upon the right, and the 6th Berkshires upon the left, with the 10th Essex in support and the 8th Suffolk in reserve. The first two lines were taken in their stride with little loss. A strong point behind these lines held them up for a short time, but was rushed, and its garrison of the 109th Regiment was captured. Further progress of the Norfolks was made difficult, however, by a flanking fire and by a second redoubt in front. As in the case of the 53rd Brigade



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it was found that the way round is often the shorter. Two bombing parties under gallant subalterns worked up the trenches on the flank, while that murderous weapon, a Stokes gun, was brought up and opened fire. The combined effect was decisive and 150 Germans threw down their arms. Sixty more were taken in another redoubt to the left.

Whilst the Norfolks had been fighting their way forward in this fashion the Berkshires upon their left, following very closely upon their own barrage, had attained their objective in twenty minutes, and had to hold it for some hours until the Norfolks had made good. During this time their right flank was necessarily exposed. This flank was defended successfully by means of bombing parties and a Lewis gun, while the left company instead of resting lent a hand to their neighbours of the 54th Brigade in carrying Pommiers Redoubt.

Meanwhile the Norfolks had come ahead again, but the advance of the Berkshires was held up by a small but determined band of bombers and snipers in a strong position. A Stokes mortar drove back the bombers, but the snipers still held fast, and killed in succession Lieutenant Rushton and Lieutenant Saye who gallantly attacked them. A sergeant-major of the Berkshires was more fortunate, however, and killed the chief sniper whose automatic rifle had played the part of a machine-gun. In doing so he was severely wounded himself. The Essex had come up into the firing line, but progress was still slow until an invaluable Stokes mortar was again brought to bear and with its shower of heavy bombs blasted the strong point out of existence. When night fell the whole line of Montauban Alley had been successfully

won and the various units were in close touch and were busily organising their position.

Great obstinacy was shown by the Germans in their defence, which was a gallant one, and might well have been successful against a less skilful attack. Among other instances of their tenacity was one in which a sniper in a trench behind the stormers continued to fire from some subterranean retreat and defied all efforts to get at him, until it was found necessary to blow in the whole face of the dug-out and so to bury him within his own stronghold.

The hardest fighting of any fell to the lot of the 55th Brigade upon the right. The advance was made with the 8th East Surrey and 7th Queen's Surrey in front, the latter to the left. The 7th Buffs were in support and the 7th West Kents in reserve. No sooner had the troops come out from cover than they were met by a staggering fire which held them up in the Breslau Trench. The supports had soon to be pushed up to thicken the ranks of the East Surrey—a battalion which, with the ineradicable sporting instinct and light-heartedness of the Londoner had dribbled footballs, one for each platoon, across No Man's Land and shot their goal in the front-line trench. A crater had been formed by a mine explosion, forming a gap in the German front, and round this crater a fierce fight raged for some time, the Germans rushing down a side sap which brought them up to the fray. Into this side sap sprang an officer and a sergeant of the Buffs, and killed 12 of the Germans, cutting off their flow of reinforcements, while half a company of the same battalion cleared up the crater and captured a machine-gun which had fought to the last cartridge. It is worth recording

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that in the case of one of these machine-guns the gunner was actually found with a four-foot chain attaching him to the tripod. Being badly wounded and unable to disengage himself, the wretched man had dragged himself, his wound, and his tripod for some distance before being captured by the British. The fact was duly established by a sworn inquiry.

The brigade was winning its way forward, but the hard resistance of the Germans had delayed it to such a point that there was a danger that it would not be in its place so as to cover the left flank of the 90th Brigade, who were due to attack Montauban at 10 A.M. Such a failure might make the difference between victory and defeat. At this critical moment the officer commanding the East Surreys dashed to the front, re-formed his own men with all whom he could collect and led them onwards. Captain Neville was killed in gallantly leading the rush, but the wave went forward. There was check after check, but the point had to be won, and the Suffolks of the 53rd Brigade were brought round to strengthen the attack, while the West Kents were pushed forward to the fighting line. By mid-day two platoons of West Kents were into Montauban Alley, and had seized two houses at the western end of Montauban, which were rapidly fortified by a section of the 92nd Field Company. The flank of the 90th was assured. A South African officer led the first group of Surrey men who seized Montauban. He is said during the action to have slain seventeen of the enemy.

The rest of the brigade, however, had desperate work to get into line with the village. The East Surreys and Buffs were coming along well, but the



Queen's Surreys had lost heavily and were held up by a strong point called Back Trench. A major of the Queen's gathered his men together, called up a bombing party from the 8th Sussex, the pioneer battalion of the brigade, and then by a united front and flank attack carried the position. One hundred and seventy Germans remained alive in the trench. The infantry then surged forward to the line of the Mametz-Montauban Road, where they lay under machine-gun fire with their left in the air, for a considerable gap had developed between them and the 53rd Brigade. The main line of Montauban Alley in front of them was still strongly held by the enemy.

Once again the Stokes guns saved what looked like a dangerous situation. They blasted a hole in Montauban Alley, and through the hole rushed a furious storming party of the Queen's. As evening fell, after that long day of fighting, the weary Eighteenth Division, splendid soldiers, splendidly led, held the whole line from Montauban to the junction with the Seventh Division near Mametz. One does not know which to admire most—the able dispositions, the inflexible resolution of the troops, or the elastic adaptability which enabled the initiative of the officers upon the spot to use ever-varying means for getting over the successive difficulties. The losses were very heavy, amounting to about 3000 officers and men, something under 1000 being fatal. Of the Germans 700 were captured, 1200 were buried after the action, and the total loss could not possibly have been less than those incurred by the British. It should be added that a great deal of the success of the attack was due to the 82nd, 83rd, 84th, and 85th Brigades, Royal Field Artillery, forming the divisional artillery, who earned the deepest

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gratitude of the infantry, the highest reward to which the gunner can attain. Some of the artillery of the Ninth Division was also engaged.

A few words may be said of the immediate future of the Eighteenth Division before the narrative of July 1 is completed by a consideration of the work of the Thirtieth Division. The ground captured included part of what may be called the Montauban Ridge, and the possession of this point proved to be of great service for observation in connection with the immediate operations at Bottom, Shelter, and Mametz Woods by the Fifteenth Corps. The guns were at once advanced and patrols were thrown out in front which penetrated and eventually occupied Caterpillar Wood, a long winding plantation on the immediate front of the Division. These various patrols picked up no less than twelve German field-guns abandoned by the enemy. The front was held until July 8, when the Eighteenth was relieved by the Third Division.

As to the fighting of the Germans upon this front, it was excellent as usual—but it is needful to accentuate it, as there is a tendency to depreciate the enemy at a point where he is beaten, which is an injustice to the victors. The latter had no doubts about the matter. “There is one thing we have all learned and that is that the Hun is a jolly good soldier and engineer, so don’t listen to any other nonsense. If you get hand-to-hand with him he gives in at once, but he practically never lets you get so close. As long as Fritz has a trench and a gun he will stick there till he is made crows’ rations. We know we are just slightly better than he is, but there’s nothing much in it—nothing to justify contempt or

liberties." Such was the considered opinion of an experienced soldier.

If the advance of the Eighteenth Division was successful, that of the Thirtieth upon its right was not less so. This division had been raised originally from Liverpool and Manchester, the battalions being all of the King's Liverpool or of the Manchester Regiments. The greater part of these battalions, which owe their origin largely to that great patriot, Lord Derby, were recruited on the "pal" system, by which friends in peace should be comrades in war. So close was Lord Derby's connection with the division that his brother commanded one brigade, and three of his family served with the guns, one of them commanding an artillery unit. This was the first appearance of this fine force in actual battle, and it can truly be said that no division could have been more fortunate or have given a better account of itself. It may be explained that it had exchanged its 91st Brigade for the 21st of the Seventh Division, and that several of the veteran battalions of the old Seventh now served with the Thirtieth.

The objective of this division was the important village of Montauban deep within the enemy's line. It seemed an ambitious mark in a war where every yard means an effort, but it was accomplished with surprising ease, for the advance was as determined as the defence was slack. On the right opposite Maricourt the attack fell to the 89th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Bedfords and the 17th, 19th, and 20th King's Liverpool battalions. On their left was the 21st Brigade, while the 90th Brigade was in immediate support with orders to go through and seize the village



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itself. From the start the attack went like clockwork. The artillery was admirable, the infantry inexorable, and the leading all that could be desired. The ever-ready machine-guns put up a fierce defence, especially on the left flank, where the 18th King's Liverpools, led by their popular colonel, lost three-quarters of their effectives but carried their objective none the less. The 2nd West Yorks behind them were also terribly scourged, but gained the line of the Glatz Redoubt all the same. Here, as with the Eighteenth Division, there was every sign that the garrison of the front trenches had been surprised. "The Germans gave us plenty of machine-gun fire while we were advancing upon them; when we reached the trench only a few showed fight. The rest flung up their arms and cried: 'Mercy, Kamerad!'" It was clear they had been taken by surprise, for many of them were barefooted, none of them had any equipment. When there was no attack at 4 A.M. they were then told that they could lie down and have a rest, "as the British would not now come out till four in the afternoon." It is abundantly clear that the famous German intelligence department was absolutely at fault in the southern sector of the great battle.

Although the first three trenches were carried without a hitch, the garrison of the fourth had time to stand to arms, and were greatly assisted in their defence by a flank fire from the still untaken village of Mametz, and from machine-guns in the southern corner of Mametz Wood which lies to the north of Montauban. The resistance caused considerable losses, including that of Colonel Johnson of the 17th Manchesters, but the advance was irresistible, and

swept over every obstacle until they had reached their objective. On the right, the Liverpool brigade, the 17th and 18th King's Liverpools in the lead, fought their way up to the brick-fields, which lie nearly level with Montauban, but to the south of it. A company seized these and a good bunch of prisoners. There it consolidated in close touch with the famous "iron corps" of the French army upon their right, while on the left the blue and yellow advance-flags of the Thirtieth formed a continuous line with the red and yellow of the Eighteenth Division. On the left of the Liverpools the Manchesters with the Scots Fusiliers of the 90th Brigade had stormed their way into Montauban, the first of that long list of village fortresses which were destined in the succeeding months to fall into the hands of the British. It was carried with a rush in spite of the determined resistance of small groups of Germans in various houses, which had already been greatly mauled by our artillery. The British fought their way from room to room, drove their enemies down into the cellars, and hurled bombs on to them from above. The German losses were heavy, and several hundreds of prisoners were sent to the rear. By the early afternoon the whole village was in the hands of the 90th Brigade, who had also occupied Montauban Alley, the trench 200 yards upon the farther side of it, whence by their rifle-fire they crushed several attempts at counter-attack. These were feeble during the day, but a very heavy one came during the night, aided by a powerful shrapnel fire. The Germans, advancing in the closest order, for a time won a lodgment in the new British front trench, killing a party of the 17th Manchesters, but

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they were unable to hold it, and with daylight they were ejected once more. The reader who is weary of hearing of British losses will be interested to know, on the authority of Colonel Bedell of the 16th Bavarians, that out of a garrison of 3500 men from the 6th Bavarian Reserve Regiments only 500 escaped from the Montauban front. All these operations were carried out in close touch with the French upon the right, so close indeed that the colonel of the 17th King's Liverpools, seeing that the French colonel of the flank battalion was advancing beside his men, sprang out and joined him, so that the two colonels shook hands in the captured position.

Some stress has in this narrative been laid upon the fact that the difficulties to be overcome in the south were less than those in the north. Such an assertion is only fair to the gallant men who failed. At the same time nothing should detract from the credit due to those splendid southerly divisions who really won the battle and made the hole through which the whole army eventually passed.

Though the French operations do not primarily come within the scope of this record, it is necessary to give some superficial account of them, since they form an integral and essential part of the battle. So important were they, and so successful, that it is not too much to say that it was the complete victory upon their line which atoned for our own want of success in the north, and assured that the balance of this most bloody day should be in our favour. It is true, as they would be the first to admit, that the troops of General Foch had none of those impassable barrages, concentrations of machine-guns, and desperately defended inner lines of trenches which



inflicted such losses upon our stormers. Both the positions and the men who held them were less formidable. On the other hand, it is for us to bear in mind that the French had already made their great effort in the common cause at Verdun, and that this attack upon the West was primarily a British offensive in which they were playing a subsidiary part. It is the more remarkable that their success should have been so great and that they should have been able for months to come to play so notable a part in the battle that the tale of their prisoners and booty was not less than our own.

The attack of the British was roughly upon a twenty-mile front, from the Gommecourt salient to Maricourt. On this stretch they broke the German lines for 7 miles from the north of Fricourt to Montauban. The French front was about 8 miles long, and moved forward for its whole extent. Thus it may be said that the whole battle line was 28 miles, and that more than one-half, or 15 miles, represented the area of victory. During the whole operations for many months the French army was cut in two by the marshy valley of the Somme, the detachment to the north of it acting in close unison with the British Thirteenth Corps upon their left. We will call these the northern and the southern French armies, both being under the direction of General Foch.

It may briefly be stated that the advance of the French army was carried out with great dash and valour on both banks of the river. After carrying several lines of trenches at very little loss to themselves, the northern army found itself, on the evening of July 1, holding the outskirts of the villages of

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Curlu and of Hardecourt. On July 2 Curlu was entirely occupied, and shortly afterwards Hardecourt also fell. The southern army, which consisted of the fiery Colonial Division upon the left and the Twentieth upon the right, under the immediate leadership of General Fayolle, had even greater success. Not only all the lines of trenches but the villages of Dompierre, Becquincourt, Bussu, and Fay were stormed upon July 1. On the 2nd Frise and the Moreaucourt Wood had also been taken, and several counter-attacks repelled. On that evening the French were able to report that they had taken 6000 prisoners, while the British operations had yielded 3500—or 9500 in all.

When the sun set upon that bloody day—probably the most stirring of any single day in the whole record of the world—the higher command of the Allies must have looked upon the result with a strange mixture of feelings, in which dismay at the losses in the north and pride at the successes in the south contended for the mastery. The united losses of all the combatants, British, French, and Germans, must have been well over 100,000 between the rising and the setting of one summer sun. It is a rout which usually swells the casualties of a stricken army, but here there was no question of such a thing, and these huge losses were incurred in actual battle. As the attackers our own casualties were undoubtedly heavier than those of the enemy, and it is natural that as we turn from that list we ask ourselves the question whether our gains were worth it. Such a question might be an open one at Neuve Chapelle or at Loos, but here the answer must be a thousand times Yes. Together we had done the greatest day's

work in the War up to that time—a day's work which led to many developments in the future, and eventually to a general German retreat over 70 miles of front. It was not a line of trenches which we broke, it was in truth the fortified frontier of Germany built up by a year and a half of unremitting labour. By breaking it at one point we had outflanked it from the Somme to the sea, and however slow the process might be of getting room for our forces to deploy, and pushing the Germans off our flank, it was certain that sooner or later that line must be rolled up from end to end. It was hoped, too, that under our gunfire no other frontier of similar strength could grow up in front of us. That was the great new departure which may be dated from July 1, and is an ample recompense for our losses. These young lives were gladly laid down as a price for final victory—and history may show that it was really on those Picardy slopes that final victory was in truth ensured. Even as the day of Gettysburg was the turning-point of the American Civil War, and as that of Paardeberg was the real death-blow to the Boers, so the breaking of the line between Fricourt and Frise may well prove to have been the decisive victory in the terrible conflict which the swollen dreams of Prussia had brought upon the world.

When one considers the enormous scale of the action, the desperate valour of the troops engaged, and the fact that the German line was fairly and permanently broken for the first time, one feels that this date should be for ever marked in British military annals as the glorious First of July.



## CHAPTER V

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

From July 2 to July 14, 1916

General situation—Capture of La Boisselle by Nineteenth Division—  
Splendid attack by 36th Brigade upon Ovillers—Siege and  
reduction of Ovillers—Operations at Contalmaison—Desperate  
fighting at the Quadrangle by Seventeenth Division—Capture of  
Mametz Wood by Thirty-eighth Welsh Division—Capture of  
Trones Wood by Eighteenth Division.

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THE terrible fighting just described, during which the German line was broken at its southern end, was but the opening of a most desperate battle, which extended over many months. This, while it cost very heavy losses to both sides, exacted such a toll from the Germans in prisoners and lost material, as well as in casualties, that it is probable that their army would have been largely disorganised had not the wet weather of October come to hamper the operations. As it was, the letters of the soldiers and the intercepted messages of the Generals show an amount of demoralisation which proves the mighty pressure applied by the allied armies. It was a battle which was seldom general throughout the curve into which the attackers had encroached, but which confined itself to this or that limited objective—to the north, to the east,

or to the south, the blow falling the more suddenly, since during the whole of this time the Allies preserved the command of the air to an extent which actually enabled them to push their guns forward across the open. Sometimes it was a fortified village which was carried. Sometimes it was the trenches between villages, so that the garrisons might feel in danger of being cut off. Sometimes—the worst obstacle of all—it was one of the patches of wood dotted over the countryside, which had to be cleared of the enemy's stubborn infantry and machine-gunners. But whatever the task might be, it may be stated generally that it was always carried out, if not at the first, then at the second, third, or some subsequent attempt. It may also be said that never once during all that time did a yard of ground which had been taken by the Allies pass permanently back to the enemy. Before the winter had fallen more than forty villages had been carried and held by the attack—but not one by the counter-attack. The losses were heavy, sometimes very heavy, but so perfect now was the co-ordination between infantry and guns, and so masterful the allied artillery, that it is highly probable that at last the defence was losing as many as the attack. Those deep ravines which had enabled the Germans to escape the effects of the early bombardments no longer existed in the new lines, and the superficial ditches which now formed the successive lines of defence offered little protection from a fire directed by a most efficient air service. On the other hand, since the German air service had been beaten out of the sky, the sight of the German gunners was dim, and became entirely blind when by their successive advances the Allies had pushed them over the

low ridges which formed their rearward positions. The map, however skilfully used, is a poor substitute for the observation officer and the aeroplane.

Standing on the edge of this welter, and gazing at this long haze into which vigorous divisions continually plunge, relieving exhausted units, only to stagger out in their turn, rent and torn, while yet others press to the front, one feels appalled at the difficulty of following such complex operations and of conveying them clearly and in their due order to the mind of the reader. Some fixed system must evidently be followed if the narrative is to remain intelligible and the relation of the various actions to each other to be made evident. Therefore the course of events will still, so far as possible, be traced from the north, and each incident be brought to some sort of natural pause before we pass onwards down the line. We can at once eliminate the whole northern portion of the British line from the Gommecourt salient down to Albert, since for that long stretch attack had changed definitely to defence, and we start our narrative from the south of the Albert—Bapaume road. From that point four villages immediately faced the old British line, and each was now a centre of fighting. From the north they were La Boisselle, Fricourt, Mametz, and Montauban. The latter had been held against a strong counter-attack on the early morning of July 2, and it was firmly in the possession of the Thirtieth Division. Mametz was held by the Seventh Division, who were pushing on to the north, driving a weak resistance before them. Fricourt had been deserted by the morning of July 2, and had been occupied by the Seventeenth Division, who also at once pushed on towards the woodlands



behind. La Boisselle was closely assailed with part of the Thirty-fourth Division to the south of it, and the Twelfth and Nineteenth Divisions with other troops all round it. These four villages and the gaps between them represented the break in the German front line.

The second German main line ran through the Bazentins and Longueval, and it was reached and carried by the British Army upon July 14. The intervening fortnight between the battle of the front and of the second line was occupied in clearing the many obstacles, consisting for the most part of woods and subsidiary trenches which filled the space between the two lines, and also in attacking the two villages of Ovillers and Contalmaison, which hampered operations upon the left wing. It will help the reader very much to understand these apparently complex movements if he will realise that they divide themselves into three distinct groups of activity, counting from the north of the line. The first group is concerned with the capture of Ovillers, and in it the Twelfth, Nineteenth, Thirty-second, and Twenty-fifth Divisions are concerned. The second group is connected with the capture of the strong position which is bastioned by Contalmaison upon one side and Mametz Wood at the other, with the Quadrangle system of trenches between. In this very severe conflict the Twenty-third, Seventeenth, Seventh, and Thirty-eighth Divisions were engaged. Finally there is the group of operations by which the right wing was advanced through Bernafey Wood and up to Trones Wood. In these, the Ninth, Thirtieth, and Eighteenth Divisions were chiefly concerned. We shall now take each of these in turn, beginning with the

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northern one, the taking of Ovillers, and carrying each narrative to a definite term. Before embarking upon this account it should be mentioned that the two northern corps of Rawlinson's army—the Eighth and Tenth—were from now onwards detached as a separate Fifth Army under Sir Hubert Gough, one of the most rising commanders in the Service. The functions of this Army were to hold the line from La Boisselle to Serre, and to form a defensive flank and pivot for the Third, Fifteenth, and Thirteenth Corps to the south.

We shall first follow the further fortunes of the troops which operated in the north. Upon July 3 there was a short but severe action upon that part of the old British line immediately to the left of the gap which had been broken. In this action, which began at 6 A.M., the Thirty-second Division, already greatly weakened by its exertions two days before, together with the 75th Brigade, lent them by the Twenty-fifth Division, tried to widen the rent in the German line by tearing open that portion of it which had been so fatal to the Eighth Division. The attack failed, however, though most bravely delivered, and the difficulties proved once more to be unsurmountable. The attempt cost us heavy casualties, a considerable proportion of which fell upon the 75th Brigade, especially upon the 11th Cheshires, whose colonel was killed, and upon the 2nd South Lancashires, who ran into wire and were held up there. The 8th Borders reached their objective, but after one-and-a-half hours were forced to let go of it. The operation proved that whatever misfortunes had befallen the Germans to the south, they were still rooted as firmly as ever

in their old positions. The same lesson was to be taught us on the same morning at an adjacent portion of the line.

This episode was at the immediate south of the unsuccessful attack just described. It has already been stated that the Twelfth, the English division which had seen so much hard fighting at Loos, had taken over part of the trenches of the Eighth Division, and so found themselves facing Ovillers. Their chances of a successful advance upon the village were increased by the fact that the Nineteenth Division, after hard fighting, had got into La Boisselle to the south, and so occupied a flank to their advance.

Some further definition is required as to the situation at La Boisselle, how it was brought about, and its extreme importance to the general plan of operations. When the left of the Thirty-fourth Division had failed to hold the village, while some mixed units of the right brigade had established themselves within the German lines as already narrated, it became very vital to help them by a renewed attempt upon the village itself. For this purpose the Nineteenth Division had moved forward, a unit which had not yet been seriously engaged. It was under the command of a fighting Irish dragoon, whose whimsical expedient for moving forwards the stragglers at St. Quentin has been recorded in a previous volume. On the evening of July 1, one battalion of this division, the 9th Cheshires, had got into the German front line trench near the village, but they were isolated there and hard put to it to hold their own during a long and desperate night. On the following afternoon, about 4 o'clock, two of their fellow-battalions of the 58th Brigade, the 9th



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Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the 6th Wilts, charged suddenly straight across the open at the village, while by a clever device the British barrage was turned elsewhere with the effect of misleading the German barrage which played upon the wrong area. By 9 P.M. on July 2 the south end of the village had been captured, but the resistance was still very fierce. Early next morning the whole of the division was drawn into this street fighting, and gradually the Germans were pushed back. There was one desperate counter-attack during which the British line was hard put to it to hold its own, and the house-to-house fighting continued throughout the whole day and night. Two British colonels, one of the 7th South Lancashires and the other of the 8th Gloucesters, particularly distinguished themselves in this close fighting. The latter, a dragoon like his commander, was a hard soldier who had left an eye in Somaliland and a hand at Ypres, but the sight of him in this day of battle, tearing out the safety-pin of bombs with his teeth and hurling them with his remaining hand, was one which gave heart to his men. Slowly the Germans were worn down, but the fighting was fierce and the British losses heavy, including three commanding officers, Wedgwood of the North Staffords, Royston Piggott of the 10th Worcesters, and Heath of the 10th Warwicks, the first two killed, the latter wounded. In the midst of the infantry fighting a single gun of the 19th Battery galloped with extraordinary gallantry right into the village and engaged the enemy point-blank with splendid effect. For this fine performance Captain Campbell and ten men of the gun's crew received decorations. By the evening of the 6th the whole

village was solidly consolidated by the Nineteenth Division, they had broken up a strong counter-attack from the direction of Pozières, and they had extended their conquest so as to include the redoubt called Heligoland. We must turn, however, to the attack which had in the meanwhile been prepared upon the line to the immediate north of La Boisselle by the Twelfth Division.

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This attack was carried out at three in the morning of July 7 by the 35th and the 37th Brigades. The fighting line from the right consisted of the 5th Berks, 7th Suffolks, 6th Queen's Surrey, and 6th West Kent, with the other battalions in close support. Unhappily, there was a group of machine-guns in some broken ground to the north of La Boisselle, which had not yet been reached by the Nineteenth Division, and the fire of these guns was so deadly that the battalions who got across were too weak to withstand a counter-attack of German bombers. They were compelled, after a hard struggle, to fall back to the British line. One curious benefit arose in an unexpected way from the operation, for part of the 9th Essex, losing its way in the dark, stumbled upon the rear of the German defenders of the northern edge of La Boisselle, by which happy chance they took 200 prisoners, helped the Nineteenth in their task, and participated in a victory instead of a check.

It was evident that before the assault was renewed some dispositions should be made to silence the guns which made the passage perilous. With this in view, another brigade, the 74th from the Twenty-fifth Division, was allotted to the commander of the Twelfth Division, by whom it was placed between his

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own position and that held by the Nineteenth at La Boisselle. It was arranged that these fresh troops should attack at eight o'clock in the morning of July 7, approaching Ovillers from the south, and overrunning the noxious machine-guns, while at 8.30 the 36th Brigade, hitherto in reserve, should advance upon Ovillers from the west. By this difference of half an hour in the attack it was hoped that the 74th would have got the guns before the 36th had started.

After an hour's bombardment the signal was given and the 74th Brigade came away with a rush, headed by the 13th Cheshires and 9th North Lancashires, with the 2nd Irish Rifles and 11th Lancashire Fusiliers in support. The advance found the Germans both in front and on either flank of them, but in spite of a withering fire they pushed on for their mark. Nearly every officer of the 13th Cheshires from Colonel Finch down to Somerset, the junior subaltern, was hit. Half-way between La Boisselle and Ovillers the attack was brought to a halt, and the men found such cover as they could among the shell-holes. Their supporting lines had come up, but beyond some bombing parties there was no further advance during the day. Fifty yards away the untaken machine-gun emplacements lay in front of them, while Ovillers itself was about 500 yards distant upon their left front.

In the meantime, after waiting half an hour, the 36th Brigade had advanced. The machine-guns were, however, still active on either flank of them, and on their immediate front lay the rubbish-heap which had once been a village, a mass of ruins now. But amid those ruins lay the Fusiliers



of the Prussian Guard—reputed to be among the best soldiers in Europe, and every chink was an embrasure for rifle or machine-gun.

The advance was one which may have been matched in the glorious annals of the British infantry, but can never have been excelled. The front line consisted of the 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers, one upon each wing, the 7th Sussex in the centre, and the 11th Middlesex in support—south-country battalions all. They had lain waiting for the signal in trenches which were beaten to pieces by a terrific German shelling. There were considerable casualties before the first man sprang from fire step to parapet. As they crossed No Man's Land bullets beat upon them from every side. The advance was rendered more frightful by the heavy weather, which held down the fumes of the poison shells, so that the craters in which men took refuge were often found to be traps from which they never again emerged. Many of the wounded met their death in this terrible fashion. Still the thin lines went forward, for nothing would stop them save death or the voice of their company officers. They were up and over the first German line. A blast of fire staggered them for a moment, and then with a splendid rally they were into the second trench, and had seized the line of hedges and walls which skirt the western edge of the village. Five hundred men were left out of those who had sprung from the British trench; but the 500 still went forward. The two Fusilier battalions had hardly the strength of a company between them, and the leaders were all down—but every man was a leader that day. Their spirit was invincible. An officer has recorded how a desperately wounded man

called out, "Are the trenches taken, sir?" On hearing that they were, he fell back and cried, "Thank God! for nothing else matters." In the centre the Sussex men still numbered nearly 300, and their colonel aided and directed while they consolidated the ground. One hundred and fifty were hit as they did so, but the handful who were left defied every effort of shell, bomb, or bayonet to put them out. A lodgment had been made, and nothing now could save the village. By a wise provision, seeing that no supplies could reach them, every man had been loaded up with twenty bombs, and had been instructed to use every captured German bomb or cartridge before any of his own. As dusk fell, two companies of the supporting Middlesex battalion were sent up, under heavy fire, to thicken the line, which was further strengthened next day by two battalions from the 37th Brigade, while the 75th Brigade prolonged it to the south. In the morning of July 9 the Twelfth Division, sorely stricken but triumphant, was drawn from the line, leaving the northern half of the Ovillers front to the Thirty-second Division and the southern half to the Twenty-fifth, the scattered brigades of which were now reunited under one general.

That commander had found himself during these operations in a difficult position, as the 74th Brigade had been moved from him and allotted to the Twelfth Division, and the Seventy-fifth by the Thirty-second Division. None the less, he had carried on vigorously with his remaining Brigade—the 7th, and had enlarged and strengthened the British position in the Leipzig salient. During July 5 and 6 the 1st Wilts and the 3rd Worcesters had both broadened and

extended their fronts by means of surprise attacks very well carried out. On the 7th they pushed forward, as part of the general scheme of extension upon that day, advancing with such dash and determination that they got ahead of the German barrage and secured a valuable trench.

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When upon Sunday, July 9, the Thirty-second Division had entirely taken over from the Twelfth on the west of Ovillers, the 14th Brigade were in the post of honour on the edge of the village. The 2nd Manchesters on the left and the 15th Highland Light Infantry on the right, formed the advanced line with the 1st Dorsets in support, while the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers were chiefly occupied in the necessary and dangerous work of carrying forward munitions and supplies. Meanwhile, the pioneer battalion, the 17th Northumberland Fusiliers, worked hard to join up the old front trench with the new trenches round Ovillers. It should be mentioned, as an example of the spirit animating the British Army, that Colonel Pears of this battalion had been invalided home for cancer, that he managed to return to his men for this battle, and that shortly afterwards he died of the disease.

On July 10 at noon the 14th Brigade advanced upon Ovillers from the west, carrying on the task which had been so well begun by the 36th Brigade. The assailants could change their ranks, but this advantage was denied to the defenders, for a persistent day and night barrage cut them off from their companions in the north. None the less, there was no perceptible weakening of the defence, and the Prussian Guard lived up to their own high traditions. A number of them had already been captured in the



trenches, mature soldiers of exceptional physique. Their fire was as murderous as ever, and the 2nd Manchesters on the north or left of the line suffered severely. The 15th Highlanders were more fortunate and made good progress. The situation had been improved by an advance at 9 P.M. upon this date, July 10, by the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers from the Sixth Division, higher up the line, who made a lodgment north-west of Ovillers, which enabled a Russian sap to be opened up from the British front line. The Inniskillings lost 150 men out of two companies engaged, but they created a new and promising line of attack.

The British were now well into the village, both on the south and on the west, but the fighting was closer and more sanguinary than ever. Bombardments alternated with attacks, during which the British won the outlying ruins, and fought on from one stone heap to another, or down into the cellars below, where the desperate German Guardsmen fought to the last until overwhelmed with bombs from above, or stabbed by the bayonets of the furious stormers. The depleted 74th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division had been brought back to its work upon July 10, and on the 12th the 14th Brigade was relieved by the 96th of the same Thirty-second Division. On the night of July 12 fresh ground was gained by a surge forward of the 2nd South Lancashires of the 75th Brigade, and of the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers, these two battalions pushing the British line almost up to Ovillers Church. Again, on the night of the 13th the 3rd Worcesters and 8th Borders made advances, the latter capturing a strong point which blocked the way to further progress. On

the 14th, however, the 10th Cheshires had a set-back, losing a number of men. Again, on the night of July 14 the 1st Dorsets cut still further into the limited area into which the German resistance had been compressed. On the night of the 15th the Thirty-second Division was drawn out, after a fortnight of incessant loss, and was replaced by the Forty-eighth Division of South Midland Territorials, the 143rd Brigade consisting entirely of Warwick battalions, being placed under the orders of the General of the Twenty-fifth Division. The village, a splintered rubbish-heap, with the church raising a stumpy wall, a few feet high, in the middle of it, was now very closely pressed upon all sides. The German cellars and dug-outs were still inhabited, however, and within them the Guardsmen were as dangerous as wolves at bay. On the night of July 15-16 a final attack was arranged. It was to be carried through by the 74th, 75th, and 143rd Brigades, and was timed for 1 A.M. For a moment it threatened disaster, as the 5th Warwicks got forward into such a position that they were cut off from supplies, but a strong effort was made by their comrades, who closed in all day until 6 P.M., when the remains of the garrison surrendered. Two German officers and 125 men were all who remained unhurt in this desperate business; and it is on record that one of the officers expended his last bomb by hurling it at his own men on seeing that they had surrendered. Eight machine-guns were taken. It is said that the British soldiers saluted the haggard and grimy survivors as they were led out among the ruins. It was certainly a very fine defence. After the capture of the village, the northern and eastern outskirts were cleared by the men of the

Forty-eighth Territorial Division, which was partly accomplished by a night attack of the 4th Gloucesters. From now onwards till July 29 this Division was engaged in very arduous work, pushing north and east, and covering the flank of the Australians in their advance upon Pozières.

So much for the first group of operations in the intermediate German position. We shall now pass to the second, which is concerned with the strong fortified line formed by the Quadrangle system of trenches between Contalmaison upon our left and Mametz Wood upon our right.

It has been mentioned under the operations of the Twenty-first Division in the last chapter that the 51st Brigade passed through the deserted village of Fricourt upon the morning of July 2, taking about 100 prisoners.

On debouching at the eastern end they swung to the right, the 7th Lincolns attacking Fricourt Wood, and the 8th South Staffords, Fricourt Farm. The wood proved to be a tangle of smashed trees, which was hardly penetrable, and a heavy fire stopped the Lincolns. The colonel, however, surmounted the difficulty by detaching an officer and a party of men to outflank the wood, which had the effect of driving out the Germans. The South Staffords were also successful in storming the farm, but could not for the moment get farther. Several hundreds of prisoners from the 111th Regiment and three guns were captured during this advance, but the men were very exhausted at the end of it, having been three nights without rest. Early next day (July 3) the advance was resumed, the 51st Brigade still to the fore, working in co-operation with the 62nd



Brigade of the Twenty-first Division upon their left. By hard fighting, the Staffords, Lincolns, and Sherwoods pushed their way into Railway Alley and Railway Copse, while the 7th Borders established themselves in Bottom Wood. The operations came to a climax when in the afternoon a battalion of the 186th Prussian Regiment, nearly 600 strong, was caught between the two Brigades in Crucifix Trench and had to surrender; altogether the 51st Brigade had done a very strenuous and successful spell of duty. The ground gained was consolidated by the 77th Field Company, Royal Engineers.

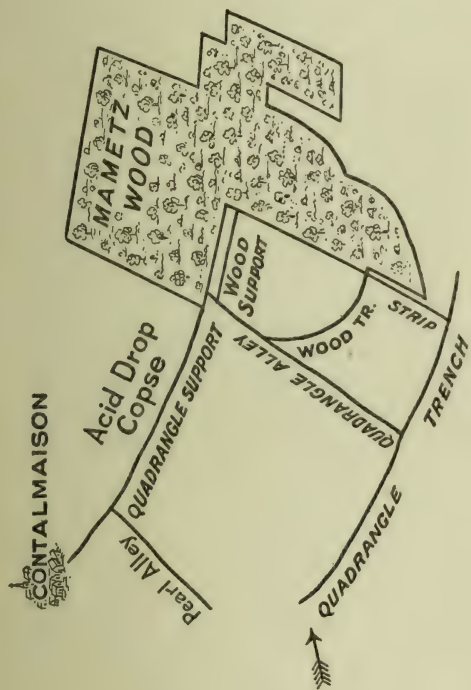
The 62nd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division, supported by the 63rd, had moved parallel to the 51st Brigade, the 1st Lincolns, 10th Yorkshires, and two battalions of Northumberland Fusiliers advancing upon Shelter Wood and carrying it by storm. It was a fine bit of woodland fighting, and the first intimation to the Germans that their fortified forests would no more stop British infantry than their village strongholds could do. The enemy, both here and in front of the Seventeenth Division, were of very different stuff from the veterans of Ovillers, and surrendered in groups as soon as their machine-guns had failed to stop the disciplined rush of their assailants. After this advance, the Twenty-first Division was drawn out of line for a rest, and the Seventeenth extending to the left was in touch with the regular 24th Brigade, forming the right of Babington's Twenty-third Division, who were closing in upon Contalmaison. On the right the 17th were in touch with the 22nd Brigade of the Seventh Division, which was pushing up towards the dark and sinister clumps

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of woodland which barred their way. On the night of July 5 an advance was made, the Seventh Division upon Mametz Wood, and the Seventeenth upon the Quadrangle Trench, connecting the wood with Contalmaison. The attack upon the wood itself had no success, though the 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers reached their objective, but the 52nd Brigade was entirely successful at Quadrangle Trench, where two battalions—the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 10th Lancashire Fusiliers—crept up within a hundred yards unobserved and then carried the whole position with a splendid rush. It was at once consolidated. The Twenty-third Division had advanced upon the left and were close to Contalmaison. On the night of July 5 the Seventh Division was drawn out and the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division took over the line which faced Mametz Wood.

The Seventeenth Division, after its capture of the Quadrangle Trench, was faced by a second very dangerous and difficult line called the Quadrangle Support, the relative position of which is shown upon the diagram on the next page.

It is clear that if either Mametz Wood or Contalmaison were to fall, this trench would become untenable for the Germans, but until those two bastions, or at least one of them, was in our hands, there was such a smashing fire beating down upon an open advance of 600 yards, that no harder task could possibly be given to a Division. The trench was slightly over the brow of a slope, so that when the guns played upon it the garrison were able to slip quickly away and take refuge in Mametz Wood, coming back again in time to meet an assault which they were well aware could only be delivered by



# QUADRANGLE POSITION July 5-11, 1916.

Arrows for British  
line of Attack.



troops which had passed through an ordeal of fire which must shake and weaken them.

It seemed that the best chance to bring a striking force up to the trench was to make the attempt at night, so at 2 A.M. of July 7 the 9th Northumberland Fusiliers and 10th Lancashire Fusiliers, the same battalions which had already taken Quadrangle Trench, advanced through the darkness of an inclement night upon their objective. The enemy proved, however, to be in great force, and their trench was stuffed with men who were themselves contemplating an attack. A party of Lancashire Fusiliers got into Pearl Alley, which is on the left near Contalmaison, but the village stands on a slight eminence, and from it the trench and the approaches can be swept by fire. The British attack was driven back with loss, and was followed up by the 9th Grenadiers of the Prussian Guard, who were in turn driven back by the left of the British line, consisting of the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers and some of the 1st Worcesters. In the morning another attempt was made upon Quadrangle Support, this time by the 9th West Ridings and the 12th Manchesters. Small parties got up to Acid Drop Copse, close to Contalmaison, but they were too weak to hold on. At the end of this attack the 52nd Brigade, which had been so badly mauled, was drawn out and the 51st put back in its place.

This severe fighting at the Quadrangle was part of a wider action, which was to include an attack by the Twenty-third Division upon Contalmaison and an attack by the Thirty-eighth upon Mametz Wood. The Contalmaison attack won its way into the north-west side of the village at 11 o'clock on the morning

of July 7, but by 12 o'clock it had been held and eventually repulsed. By 4.30 the 24th Brigade of the Twenty-third Division, which was on the immediate left of the Seventeenth Division, had been driven back to its trenches, the 1st Worcesters, 2nd East Lancashires, and 2nd Northamptons suffering heavily.

Whilst the Contalmaison attack had failed upon the left, that upon Mametz Wood had no better success upon the right. It was to have been carried out by the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division, but in its approach such opposition was encountered to the wood that the 16th Welsh (City of Cardiff) and 10th South Wales Borderers could not get forward. Meanwhile, the 50th Brigade from the Seventeenth Division had been told off to co-operate with this attack, and naturally found themselves with their right flank in the air, the 7th East Yorks suffering severely in consequence. None the less, some advance was made upon this side.

In the night of July 7 a third attack was made upon Quadrangle Support, with no better result than the others. On this occasion the 51st Brigade had relieved the 52nd, and it was the 10th Sherwood Foresters which endured the heavy losses, and persevered until they were within bomb-throw of their objective, losing Major Hall Brown, a gallant Ceylon planter, and many officers and men. At the same hour the 50th Brigade had again tried to gain ground in the direction of Mametz Wood, but had failed on account of uncut wire. The military difficulties of the situation during this day were greatly enhanced by the state of the ground, owing to most unseasonable heavy rain, which left four feet of mud in some of the trenches. Altogether, when one considers the want

of success at Ovillers, the repulse at Contalmaison, the three checks in one day at the Quadrangle, and the delay of the attack on Mametz Wood, the events of July 7 showed that the task of the British, even inside a broken German line, was still a very heavy one. General Horne upon the line and Sir Douglas Haig behind it must both have felt the strain that night.

At six in the morning of July 8 the undefeatable Seventeenth Division was again hard at work encompassing the downfall of its old opponents in Quadrangle Support. Since it could not be approached above ground, it was planned that two brigades, the 51st and the 50th, should endeavour to bomb their way from each side up those trenches which were in their hands. It is wonderful that troops which had already endured so much, and whose nerve might well be shattered and their hearts broken by successive failures, should still be able to carry out a form of attack which of all others call for dash and reckless courage. It was done, none the less, and with some success, the bombers blasting their way up Pearl Alley on the left to the point where it joins on to the Quadrangle Support. The bombers of the 7th Lincolns did particularly well. "Every attempted attack by the Bosche was met by them with the most extraordinary Berserker fury. They utterly cowed the enemy." So wrote an experienced spectator. On the right the 50th Brigade made some progress also up Quadrangle Alley. Artillery fire, however, put a term to the advance in both instances, the guns of Contalmaison dominating the whole position. In the evening a fresh bombing attack was made by the same



troops, whose exertions seem really to have reached the limit of human capacity. This time the 7th Borders actually reached Quadrangle Support, but were unable to get farther. The same evening some of the 50th Brigade bombed down Wood Trench towards Mametz Wood, so as to facilitate the coming attack by the Thirty-eighth Division. On July 9 both Brigades again tried to bomb their way into Quadrangle Support, and were again held up by the enemy's fire. This was the sixth separate attempt upon the same objective by the same soldiers—an example surely of the wonderful material of which the New Armies were composed.

But their labours were not yet done. Though both brigades were worn to shadows, it was still a point of honour to hold to their work. At 11.20 that night a surprise attack was made across the open under the cover of night. The 8th South Staffords on the left—charging with a yell of “Staffords!”—reached the point where Pearl Alley joins the Quadrangle Support (see Diagram), and held on most desperately. The 50th Brigade on the right were checked and could give no assistance. The men upon the left strove hard to win their way down Quadrangle Support, but most of the officers were down, the losses were heavy, and the most that they could do was to hold on to the junction with Pearl Alley. The 50th were ready to go forward again to help them, and the Yorkshire men were already on the move; but day was slowly breaking and it was doubtful if the trench could be held under the guns of Contalmaison. The attack upon the right was therefore stopped, and the left held on as best it might, the South Staffords, having lost

grievously, nearly all their officers, including the Adjutant, Coleridge, being on the ground.

We may now leave this heroic tragedy of the Quadrangle and turn our attention to what had been going on at Mametz Wood upon the right, which was really the key to the situation. It has already been stated that the wood had been attacked in vain by a brigade of the Seventh Division, and that the Thirty-eighth Welsh Division had found some difficulty in even approaching it. It was indeed a formidable obstacle upon the path of the army. An officer has described how he used to gaze from afar upon the immense bulk, the vast denseness and darkness of Mametz Wood, and wonder, knowing the manifold dangers which lurked beneath its shadows, whether it was indeed within human power to take it. Such was the first terrible task to which the Welshmen of the New Army were called. It was done, but one out of every three men who did it found the grave or the hospital before the survivors saw the light shine between the further tree-trunks.

As the Welshmen came into the line they had the Seventeenth Division upon their left, facing Quadrangle Support, and the Eighteenth upon their right at Caterpillar Wood. When at 4.15 on the morning of July 10 all was ready for the assault, the Third Division had relieved the Eighteenth on the right, but the Seventeenth was, as we have seen, still in its position, and was fighting on the western edge of the wood.

The attack of the Welshmen started from White Trench, which lies south-east of the wood and meanders along the brow of a sharp ridge. Since it was dug by the enemy it was of little use to the attack,

for no rifle fire could be brought to bear from it upon the edge of the wood, while troops coming over the hill and down the slope were dreadfully exposed. Apart from the German riflemen and machine-gunners, who lay thick among the shell-blasted stumps of trees, there was such a tangle of thick undergrowth and fallen trunks lying at every conceivable angle that it would take a strong and active man to make his way through the wood with a fowling-piece for his equipment and a pheasant for his objective. No troops could have had a more desperate task—the more so as the German second line was only a few hundred yards from the north end of the wood, whence they could reinforce it at their pleasure.

The wood is divided by a central ride running north and south. All to the west of this was allotted to the 113th Brigade, a unit of Welsh Fusilier battalions commanded by a young brigadier who is more likely to win honour than decorations, since he started the War with both the V.C. and the D.S.O. The 114th Brigade, comprising four battalions of the Welsh Regiment, was to carry the eastern half of the wood, the attack being from the south. The front line of attack, counting from the right, consisted of the 13th Welsh (2nd Rhonddas), 14th Welsh (Swansea), with its left on the central ride, and 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in the van of the 113th Brigade. About 4.30 in the morning the barrage lifted from the shadowy edge of the wood, and the infantry pushed forward with all the Cymric fire which burns in that ancient race as fiercely as ever it has done, as every field of manly sport will show. It was a magnificent spectacle, for wave after wave of men could be seen advancing without hesitation and without a break



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The Swansea men in the centre broke into the wood without a check, a lieutenant of that battalion charging down two machine-guns and capturing both at the cost of a wound to himself. The 13th on the right won their way also into the wood, but were held for a time, and were reinforced by the 15th (Carmarthens). Here for hours along the whole breadth of the wood the Welsh infantry strove desperately to crawl or burst through the tangle of tree-trunks in the face of the deadly and invisible machine-guns. Some of the 15th got forward through a gap, but found themselves isolated, and had great difficulty in joining up with their own battle line once more. Eventually, in the centre and right, the three battalions formed a line just south of the most southern cross ride from its junction with the main ride.

On the left, the 16th Welsh Fusiliers had lost heavily before reaching the trees, their colonel, Carden, falling at the head of his men. The circumstances of his death should be recorded. His Welsh Fusiliers, before entering action, sang a hymn in Welsh, upon which the colonel addressed them, saying, "Boys, make your peace with God! We are going to take that position, and some of us won't come back. But we are going to take it." Tying his handkerchief to his stick he added, "This will show you where I am." He was hit as he waved them on with his impromptu flag; but he rose, advanced, was hit again, and fell dead.

Thickened by the support of the 15th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the line rushed on, and occupied the end

**MAMETZ  
WOOD**

N

Trench

W

E

Wood Support

Wood Trench

S

← Marks line of  
attack of 38th  
Division.



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of the wood until they were abreast of their comrades on the right. Once among the trees, all cohesion was lost among the chaos of tangled branches and splintered trunks, every man getting on as best he might, with officers rallying and leading forward small groups, who tripped and scrambled onwards against any knot of Germans whom they could see. On this edge of the wood some of the Fusiliers bombed their way along Strip Trench, which outlines the south-western edge, in an endeavour to join hands with the 50th Brigade on their left. At about 6.30 the south end of the wood had been cleared, and the Welshmen, flushed with success, were swarming out at the central ride. A number of prisoners, some hale, some wounded, had been taken. At 7 o'clock the 113th were in touch with the 114th on the right, and with the 50th on the left.

Further advance was made difficult by the fact that the fire from the untaken Wood Support Trench upon the left swept across the ride. The losses of the two Fusilier battalions had been so heavy that they were halted while their comrades of the 13th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, under Colonel Flower, who was killed by a shell, attacked Wood Support—eventually capturing the gun which had wrought such damage, and about 50 Germans. This small body had succeeded, as so often before and since, in holding up a Brigade and disorganising an advance. Until the machine-gun is checkmated by the bullet-proof advance, the defensive will maintain an overpowering and disproportionate advantage.

The 10th Welsh had now come up to reinforce the left of the 114th Brigade, losing their colonel, Rickets, as they advanced into the wood. The 19th



Welsh Pioneer Battalion also came forward to consolidate what had been won. There was a considerable pause in the advance, during which two battalions—the 17th Welsh Fusiliers and the 10th South Wales Borderers from the Reserve Brigade, 115th—came up to thicken the line. At about four, the attack was renewed, until at least two-thirds of the wood had been gained. The South Wales Borderers worked up the eastern side, pushing the defenders into the open, where they were shot down by British machine-guns in Caterpillar Wood and Marlborough Wood. About 50 yards from the northern end the khaki line was at last held up and remained there, crouching in shell-holes or behind broken trunks. The main resistance came from a trench outside the wood, and it was eventually determined to bombard it, for which purpose the troops were withdrawn some hundreds of yards. Late in the evening there was another gallant attempt to get the edge of the wood, but the trench was as venomous as ever, and the main German second line behind it was sweeping the underwood with bullets, so the advance was halted for the night.

During the night the 115th Brigade had come to the front, and in the morning of July 11 had relieved the 113th and 114th Brigades. The relief in a thick wood, swept by bullets, and upon a dark night in the close presence of a formidable enemy, was a most difficult operation. The morning was spent in reconnaissance, and it was only at 3.15 P.M. that the advance could be made upon the main German defence, a trench just outside the north end of the wood. About 4 o'clock the Brigade swept on, and after a sharp bayonet fight gained the trench towards the north-east, but the

Germans still held the centre and swept with their fire the portion in our possession. The 11th South Wales Borderers (2nd Gwents) held on splendidly, in spite of their heavy losses. The situation was now such, with only 300 yards to go to reach the German second line, that it was deemed well to relieve the Thirty-eighth Division by the Twenty-first Division, who had been selected for the coming battle. This change was carried out by the morning of July 12.

The action of the Thirty-eighth Division in capturing Mametz Wood had been a very fine one, and the fruit of their victory was not only an important advance, but 398 prisoners, one field gun, three heavy guns, a howitzer and a number of smaller pieces. It was the largest wood in the Somme district, and the importance attached to it by the Germans may be gathered from the fact that men of five different German regiments, the 3rd Lehr, 16th Bavarians, 77th, 83rd, and 122nd, were identified among our opponents. Among many instances of individual valour should be mentioned that of a colonel of the Divisional Staff, who twice, revolver in hand, led the troops on where there was some temporary check or confusion. It is impossible to imagine anything more difficult and involved than some of this fighting, for apart from the abattis and other natural impediments of a tangled wood, the place was a perfect rabbit-warren of trenches, and had occasional land mines in it, which were exploded—some of them prematurely, so that it was the retreating Germans who received the full force of the blast. Burning petrol was also used continually in the defence, and frequently proved to be a two-edged weapon. Some of the garrison stood to their work

with extraordinary courage, and nothing but the most devoted valour upon the part of their assailants could have driven them out. "Every man of them was killed where he stood," said a Welsh Fusilier, in describing the resistance of one group. "They refused offers of quarter right to the last, and died with cheers for the Kaiser or words of defiance on their lips. They were brave men, and we were very sorry indeed to have to kill them, for we could not but admire them for their courage." Such words give honour both to victors and vanquished. The German losses were undoubtedly very heavy—probably not less than those of the Welsh Division.

Though the Welsh Division had overrun Mametz Wood from south to north, there was still one angle in the north-west which had lain out of their course, and had not been taken by them. This part of the wood was occupied upon the evening of July 11 by the 62nd Brigade of the Twenty-first Division, which had already performed such notable services upon the Somme. Eight field-guns were discovered in this part of the wood and were captured by the Brigade.

The situation had now greatly improved for the Seventeenth Division in front of Quadrangle Support, for not only was Mametz Wood mostly in the hands of the Welsh, but the Twenty-third Division on the left, who after their temporary check at Contalmaison had fallen back upon the line Peake Alley—Birch Tree Wood—Shelter Wood, now came forward again and occupied Bailiff Wood upon the north of Contalmaison. Under these circumstances, the 50th Brigade upon the right again attempted to get forward in order to keep level with the Welsh in the wood.

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Connection had not yet been made at that point, however, and the 7th East Yorks, who were the leading battalion, suffered heavy losses before being compelled to abandon the attempt.

Victory, however, was at last coming to reward the living and vindicate the dead. At four in the afternoon of July 10, the Twenty-third Division advanced from Bailiff Wood for its second assault upon Contalmaison. This time everything went to perfection, and the much-enduring infantry were able to take possession of the village, while a counter-attack by the third Reserve Division of the Prussian Guards came under concentrated artillery fire, and was completely disorganised and destroyed. It was the wounded of the Guard from this attack who were seen at Potsdam, and described by Mr. Curtin, the American journalist, in one of the most brilliant articles of the War. Carried into furniture vans, they were conveyed to their hospitals with every secrecy, in order to conceal from the populace the results of the encounter between the famous Corps and those men of the New Army who for more than a year had been the favourite butt of the *Witz-Blätter* of Berlin. Old Father Time has a humour of his own, and his laugh is usually the last. Besides the Guard the 70th Jaeger and the 110th, 114th, and 119th Regiments were included in this defeat.

The two bastions having fallen, the problem of the Quadrangle Support became a very different one, and the 51st Brigade, joining up with the right of the Twenty-third Division in the evening, was able to get hold of the left end of it. Even now, however, the Germans fought hard to the right, and both the 7th East Yorks and the 6th Dorsets had to push strongly

before they could win through. They were encouraged in their efforts when, in the waning light, they were able to see small bodies of the enemy retiring in the distance out of the fringe of the wood. By ten o'clock that night the long task had been accomplished, and the dead might sleep in peace, for Quadrangle Support was in the hands of the Seventeenth Division. They were relieved by the Twenty-first Division upon July 11.

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At or about the same time as the relief of the Seventeenth Division, the Twenty-third upon their left were also relieved, their line being taken over by the First Division. Since the capture of Contalmaison and the heavy repulse of the German Guard Division the British had made further progress, so that both Pearl Wood and Contalmaison Villa to the north of the village were firmly in their hands. The instructions to the First Division were to endeavour to improve this advantage, and an advance was at once made which, occurring as it did upon the night of July 15, may be best described under the heading which treats of the breaking of the second German line.

Having dealt with the operations upon the left and those in the centre of the intermediate German position, we will now turn to those upon the right, which are concerned with the Eighteenth and the Thirtieth Divisions, supported by the Ninth. After the fall of Montauban, these Divisions advanced, the one upon Caterpillar Wood, and the other to Bernafoy Wood, both of which were occupied. For the occupation of Bernafoy Wood the 27th Brigade of the Ninth Division had been put at the disposal of the commander of the Thirtieth, and this

force occupied the position without much loss, but were exposed afterwards to a most deadly shell-fire, which caused heavy losses to the two front battalions—the 6th King's Own Scottish Borderers and the 6th Scots Rifles. The wood was held, however, together with three guns, which were found within it. On July 5 the Thirtieth Division handed over that line to the Ninth. On that date they sustained the heavy loss of Colonels Trotter and Smith—both killed by distant shell-fire.

The rest of the Thirtieth Division only lasted for a very few days, and upon July 7 they were facing the enemy position from Malzhorn Farm upon the right to Trones Wood upon the left, and were about to be initiated in that terrible wood fighting which cost us so dear. There is no fighting in the world which is more awesome to the mind and more exhausting to the body than such combats as these amid the ghostly atmosphere of ruined woods, with Death lurking in the shadows on every hand, and the thresh of the shells beating without cessation by night and by day. Trones, Mametz, High Wood, Delville—never has the quiet, steadfast courage of the British soldier been put to a more searching test than in those haunts of gloom and horror. In the case of Trones Wood some account must be given of the peculiar tactical difficulties of the situation, and then we shall turn to the sombre but glorious narrative of the successive attacks.

The tactical problem was a remarkable one. The wood was connected up on the German side by good lines of trenches with Malzhorn Farm on the south, with Guillemont on the east, and with Waterlot Farm on the north—each of these points being from 400



to 700 yards away. It was also commanded by a large number of heavy guns. The result was that if the British stormers held the wood in strength, they were shelled out with heavy losses. If, on the other hand, the wood were lightly held, then the German infantry pouring in from the east and north could drive them out. The British, on the other hand, had no trenches leading up to the wood, though in other respects the Germans found the same difficulties in holding the place that they did. It was a terrible contest in tenacity between the infantry of the two nations, and if in the end the British won it must at least be admitted that there was no evidence of any demoralisation among the Germans on account of the destruction of their main line. They fought well, were well led, and were admirably supported by their guns.

The first attack upon Trones Wood was carried out from the south upon July 8 by the 21st Brigade. There was no suspicion then of the strength of the German position, and the attack was repulsed within a couple of hours, the 2nd Yorks being the chief sufferers.

There was more success upon the right of the line where the French were attacking Malzhorn Farm. A company of the 2nd Wilts made their way successfully to help our Allies, and gained a lodgment in the German trenches which connect Malzhorn Farm with the south end of Trones Wood. With the aid of some of the 19th Manchesters this position was extended, and two German counter-attacks were crushed by rifle-fire. The position in this southern trench was permanently held, and it acted like a self-registering gauge for the combat in

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Trones Wood, for when the British held the wood the whole Southern Trench was British, while a German success in the wood always led to a contraction in the holding of the trench.

At one o'clock upon July 8 the 21st Brigade renewed their attempt, attacking with the 2nd Wiltshires in the lead from the side of Bernafoy Wood. The advance was a fine one, but Colonel Gillson was badly wounded, and his successor in command, Captain Mumford, was killed. About three o'clock the 18th and 19th Manchesters came up in support. German bombers were driving down from the north, and the fighting was very severe. In the evening some of the Liverpools came up to strengthen the line, and it was determined to draw out the weakened 21st, and replace it by the 90th Brigade. At the same time a party of the 2nd Scots Fusiliers of this Brigade took over Malzhorn Trench, and rushed the farmhouse itself, capturing 67 prisoners. The whole of the trench was afterwards cleared up with two machine-guns and 100 more prisoners. It was a fine bit of work, worthy of that splendid battalion.

Upon July 9 at 6.40 A.M. began the third attack upon Trones Wood led by the 17th Manchesters. They took over the footing already held, and by eight o'clock they had extended it along the eastern edge, practically clearing the wood of German infantry. There followed, however, a terrific bombardment, which caused such losses that the 17th and their comrades of the 18th were ordered to fall back once more, with the result that the Scots Fusiliers had to give up the northern end of their Malzhorn Trench. An enemy counter-attack at 4.30 P.M. had no success. A fresh British attack (the fourth) was

at once organised, and carried out by the 16th Manchesters, who at 6.40 P.M. got into the south end of the wood once more, finding a scattered fringe of their comrades who had held on there. Some South African Highlanders from the Ninth Division came up to help them during the night. This fine battalion lost many men, including their colonel, Jones, while supporting the attack from Bernafoy Wood. In the morning the position was better, but a gap had been left between the Manchesters in the wood and the Scots in the trench, through which the enemy made their way. After much confused fighting and very heavy shelling, the evening of July 10 found the wood once more with the Germans.

In the early morning of July 11 the only remaining British Brigade, the 89th, took up the running. At 3.50 the 2nd Bedfords advanced to the attack. Aided by the 19th King's Liverpools, the wood was once again carried and cleared of the enemy, but once again a terrific shell-fall weakened the troops to a point where they could not resist a strong attack. The Bedfords fought magnificently, and had lost 50 per cent of their effectives before being compelled to withdraw their line. The south-east corner of the wood was carried by the swarming enemy, but the south-west corner was still in the hands of our utterly weary and yet tenacious infantry. At 9.30 the same evening the 17th King's Liverpools pushed the Germans back once more, and consolidated the ground won at the southern end. So the matter stood when the exhausted division was withdrawn for a short rest, while the Eighteenth Division took up their difficult task. The Lancashire men had left it



unfinished, but their conduct had been heroic, and they had left their successors that one corner of consolidated ground which was needed as a jumping-off place for a successful attack.

It was the 55th Brigade of the Eighteenth Division which first came up to take over the fighting line. A great responsibility was placed upon the general officer commanding, for the general attack upon the German line had been fixed for July 14, and it was impossible to proceed with it until the British held securely the covering line upon the flank. Both Trones Wood and the Malzhorn Trench were therefore of much more than local importance, so that when Haig found himself at so late a date as July 12 without command of this position, it was a very serious matter which might have far-reaching consequences. The orders now were that within a day, at all costs, Trones Wood must be in British hands, and to the 55th, strengthened by two battalions of the 54th Brigade, was given the desperate task. The situation was rendered more difficult by the urgency of the call, which gave the leaders no time in which to get acquainted with the ground.

The German defence had become a strong one. They had formed three strong points, marked S1, S2, and S3 in the Diagram, p. 141. These, together with several trenches, dotted here and there, broke up every attack, and when once order was broken it was almost impossible in the tangle and obscurity for the troops to preserve any cohesion or direction. Those troops which penetrated between the strong points found themselves with the enemy in their rear and were in a disorganised condition, which was only

overcome by the individual bravery of the men, who refused to be appalled by the difficult situation in which they found themselves.

The attack of the 55th Brigade was made from the sunken road immediately south of the wood, and it ran at once into so heavy a barrage that it lost heavily before it had reached even the edge of its objective. The 7th West Kents, who formed the attacking force, were not to be denied, however, and they pushed forward through a deepening gloom, for it was seven in the evening before the signal had been given. Whilst the Kents fought up from the south, the Queen's Surreys attempted to win a lodgment on the north-west where the Longueval Alley led up from Bernafey Wood. They also suffered heavily from the barrage, and only a few brave men reached the top of the wood and held on there for some hours. The West Kents passed the line of strong points and then lost touch with each other, until they had resolved themselves into two or three separate groups holding together as best they could in the darkness with the enemy all round them, and with the communications cut behind them. The telephone wires had all been broken by the barrage, and the anxious commanders could only know that the attack had failed, that no word came back from the front, and that a British battalion had been swallowed up by the wood.

The orders were peremptory, however, that the position should be taken, and General Maxse, without hesitation, threw a second of his brigades into the dangerous venture. It was the 54th Brigade which moved to the attack. It was just past midnight when the soldiers went forward. The actual assault

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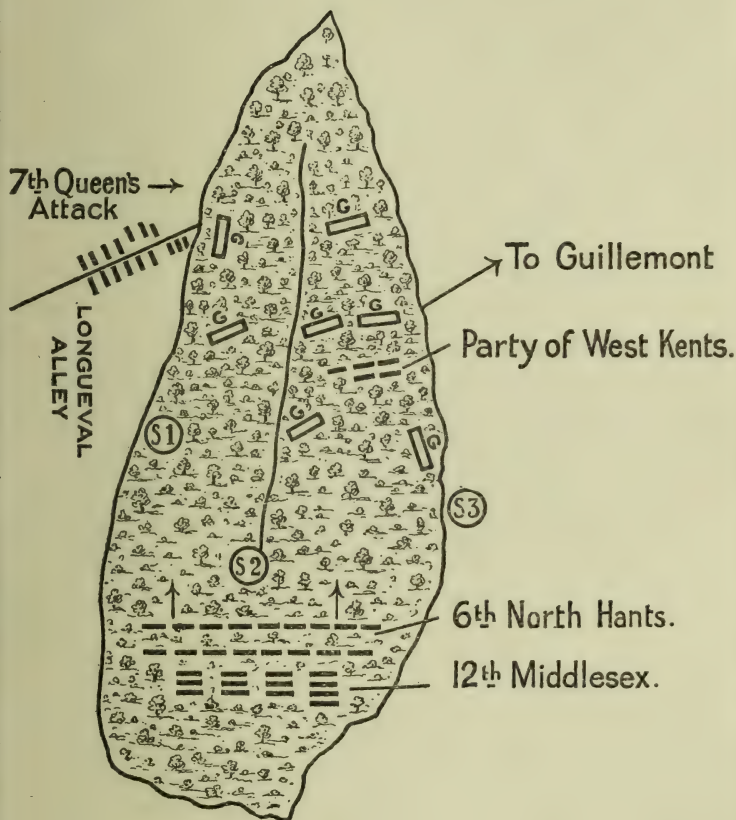
was carried out from south to north, on the same line as the advance of the West Kents. The storming battalions were the 6th Northamptons and 12th Middlesex, the former to advance direct through the wood and the latter to clean up behind them and to form a defensive flank on the right.


The attack was a fine feat of arms. Though heavily hit by the barrage, the Northamptons, closely followed by two companies of the Middlesex, pushed their way into the wood and onwards. It was pitch dark, and the men were stumbling continually over the fallen trees and the numerous dead bodies which lay among the undergrowth. None the less, they kept touch, and plodded steadily onwards. The gallant Clark was shot, but another officer led the Northamptons against the central strong point, for it had been wisely determined to leave no enemy in the rear. Shortly after dawn on July 14 this point was carried, and the Northamptons were able to get forward. By 8 o'clock the wood was full of scattered groups of British infantry, but the situation was so confused that the colonel went forward and rallied them into a single line which formed across the wood. This line advanced until it came level with the strong point S 3, which was captured. A number of the enemy then streamed out of the eastern side of the wood, making for Guillemont. These men came under British machine-gun fire and lost heavily. The remaining strong point at S 1 had been taken by a mixed group of Buffs and Middlesex about 9 A.M. These three strong points having been occupied, the whole wood was now swept clear and was permanently occupied, though still subjected to very heavy shell



# TRONES WOOD

Attack of 54<sup>th</sup> Brigade  
July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1916.



 German Troops.

 German Redoubts.

fire by the enemy. Thus, the right flank of the army was covered, and the important operations of July 14 were enabled to go forward without danger of molestation. Of the two gallant battalions who mainly achieved this important result, the losses of the Northampton were about 300, and of the Middlesex about half that amount.

There was an epilogue which was as honourable to the troops concerned as the main attack had been. This concerns the fate of the men of West Kent, who, as will be remembered, had been cut off in the wood. The main body of these, under the regimental adjutant, together with a few men of the Queen's, formed a small defensive position and held out in the hope of relief. They were about 200 all told, and their position seemed so hopeless that every excuse might have been found for surrender. They held out all night, however, and in the morning they were successfully relieved by the advance of the 54th Brigade. It is true that no severe attack was made upon them during the night, but their undaunted front may have had something to do with their immunity. Once, in the early dawn, a German officer actually came up to them under the impression that they were his own men—his last mistake upon earth. It is notable that the badges of six different German regiments were found in the wood, which seemed to indicate that it was held by picked men or volunteers from many units. "To the death!" was their password for the night, and to their honour be it said that they were mostly true to it. So also were the British stormers, of whom Sir Henry Rawlinson said: "The night attack on and final capture of Trones Wood were feats of arms

which will rank high among the best achievements of the British Army.”

An account of this fortnight of desperate and almost continuous fighting is necessarily concerned chiefly with the deeds of the infantry, but it may fitly end with a word as to the grand work of the artillery, without whom in modern warfare all the valour and devotion of the foot-soldier are but a useless self-sacrifice. Nothing could exceed the endurance and the technical efficiency of the gunners. No finer tribute could be paid them than that published at the time from one of their own officers, which speaks with heart and with knowledge: “They worked their guns with great accuracy and effect without a moment’s cessation by day or by night for ten days, and I don’t believe any artillery have ever had a higher or a longer test or have done it more splendidly. And these gunners, when the order came that we must pull out and go with the infantry—do you think they were glad or willing? Devil a bit! They were sick as muck and only desired to stay on and continue killing Bosches. And these men a year ago not even soldiers—much less gunners! Isn’t it magnificent—and is it not enough to make the commander of such men uplifted?” No cold and measured judgment of the historian can ever convey their greatness with the conviction produced by one who stood by them in the thick of the battle and rejoiced in the manhood of those whom he had himself trained and led.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Breaking of the Second Line. July 14, 1916

The great night advance—The Leicester Brigade at Bazentin—  
Assault by Seventh Division—Success of the Third Division—  
Desperate fight of Ninth Division at Longueval—Operations of  
First Division on flank—Cavalry advance.

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WITH the fall of Mametz Wood, the impending capture of Trones Wood upon the right, and the close investment of Ovillers upon the left flank, the army could now face the second line of German defences. The ground in front of them sloped gently upwards until it reached the edge of a rolling plateau. Upon this edge were three villages: Little Bazentin upon the left, Grand Bazentin upon the centre, and Longueval upon the right, all nestling among orchards and flanked by woods. Through these lay the enemy's position, extending to Pozières upon the one side, and through Guillemont to the French junction on the other. These two flanks were for the time to be disregarded, and it was determined to strike a heavy frontal blow which would, as it was hoped, crush in the whole middle of their line, leaving the sides to be dealt with at our leisure. It was a most







formidable obstacle, for all three villages were as strong as the German sappers could make them, and were connected up with great lines of trenches, the whole front which was to be attacked covering about 6000 yards. A small wood screened Little Bazentin on the left, while behind Longueval, facing the right attack, was a larger plantation which, under the name of Delville Wood, has won for itself a terrible and glorious name in British military history.

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The heavy guns had been advanced and the destruction of the German wire and trenches had begun upon July 11. On the evening of the 13th the troops mustered for the battle. They were all divisions which had already been heavily engaged, and some of them had endured losses in the last fortnight which might have seemed to be sufficient to put them out of action. None the less they were not only eager for the fight, but they were, as it proved, capable of performing the most arduous and delicate of all operations, a night march in the face of the enemy. More than a thousand yards of clear ground lay at many points between the British outposts and the German trenches. To cover it in daylight meant, as they had so often learned, a heavy loss. It was ordered, therefore, that the troops should move up to within striking distance in the darkness, and dash home with the first glimmer of morning light. There was no confusion, no loss of touch as 25,000 stormers took up their stations, and so little sound that the Germans seem to have been unaware of the great gathering in their immediate front. It was ticklish work, lying for hours within point-blank range with no cover, but the men endured it as best they might. With the first faint dawn the long line

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sprang to their feet and with a cheer dashed forward at the German trenches, while the barrage rose and went roaring to eastward whence help might come to the hard-pressed German defence.

On the extreme left of the section attacked was the First Regular Division, which took no part in the actual advance but held the flank in the neighbourhood of Contalmaison Villa, and at one period of the day sent forward its right-hand battalion, the 1st North Lancashires, to aid their neighbours in the fight.

The left of the line of actual attack was formed by the Twenty-first Division opposite to Bazentin-le-Petit. This attack was carried out upon a single brigade front, and the Brigade in question was the 110th from the Thirty-seventh Division. This division made no appearance as a unit in the Battle of the Somme, but was several times engaged in its separate brigades. On this occasion the 110th, consisting entirely of men of Leicester, took the place of the 63rd Brigade, much reduced by previous fighting. Their immediate objective was the north end of Bazentin-le-Petit village and the whole of the wood of that name. Led by the 8th and 9th Leicesters the brigade showed, as has so often been shown before, that the British soldier never fights better than in his first engagement. Owing to the co-operation of the First Division and to a very effective smoke screen upon their left, their advance was not attended with heavy loss in the earlier stages, and they were able to flow over the open and into the trenches opposite, capturing some 500 prisoners. They continued to fight their way with splendid steadiness through the wood

and held it for the remainder of the day. Their greatest trouble came from a single German strong point which was 200 yards away from the corner of the wood, and, therefore, beyond their objective. The machine-guns in this redoubt caused great loss whenever the edge of the wood was approached. This strong point was destroyed next day, but meanwhile the position was consolidated and was firmly held for the next four days, after which the division was withdrawn for a rest.

On the right of the Twenty-first Division lay the Seventh Division, to which had been assigned the assault of the Bazentin-le-Petit village. The leading brigade was the 20th, and the storming battalions, the 8th Devons and 2nd Borders, crept up to their mark in the darkness of a very obscure night. At 3.25 the barrage was lifted, and so instantaneous was the attack that there was hardly an interval between the last of the shrapnel and the first of the stormers. The whole front line was captured in an instant, and the splendid infantry rushed on without a pause to the second line, springing into the trenches once more at the moment that the gunners raised their pieces. In ten minutes both of these powerful lines had fallen. Several dug-outs were found to be crammed with the enemy, including the colonel of the Lehr Battalion, and with the machine-guns which they had been unable to hoist into their places before the wave had broken over them. When these were cleared, the advance was carried on into Bazentin-le-Grand Wood, which was soon occupied from end to end. A line in front of the wood was taken up and consolidated.

In the meanwhile the 22nd Brigade had taken



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up the work, the 2nd Warwicks pushing forward and occupying, without any opposition from the disorganised enemy, the Circus Trench, while the 2nd Royal Irish advanced to the attack of the village of Bazentin-le-Petit. Their leading company rushed the position with great dash, capturing the colonel commanding the garrison, and about 100 of his men. By 7.30 the place was in their hands, and the leading company had pushed into a trench on the far side of it, getting into touch with the Leicesters on their left.

The Germans were by no means done with, however, and they were massing thickly to the north and north-east of the houses where some scattered orchards shrouded their numbers and their dispositions. As the right of the brigade seemed to be in the air, a brave sergeant of the 2nd Warwicks set off to establish touch with the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, who formed the left unit of the Third Division upon the right. As he returned he spotted a German machine-gun in a cellar, entered it, killed the gunner, and captured four guns. The wings of the two divisions were then able to co-operate and to clear the ground in front of them.

The Irishmen in the advance were still in the air, however, having got well ahead of the line, and they were now assailed by a furious fire from High Wood, followed by a determined infantry assault. This enfilade fire caused heavy losses, and the few survivors of those who garrisoned the exposed trench were withdrawn to the shelter afforded by the outskirts of the village. There and elsewhere the Lewis guns had proved invaluable, for every man of intelligence in the battalion had been trained to their use, and in

spite of gunners being knocked out, there was never any lack of men to take their place. The German counter-attack pushed on, however, and entered the village, which was desperately defended not only by the scattered infantrymen who had been driven back to it, but also by the consolidating party from the 54th Field Company Royal Engineers and half the 24th Manchester Pioneer Battalion. At this period of the action a crowd of men from various battalions had been driven down to the south end of the village in temporary disorganisation due to the rapidity of the advance and the sudden severity of the counter-attack. These men were re-formed by the adjutant of the Irish, and were led by him against the advancing Germans, whom they drove back with the bayonet, finally establishing themselves on the northern edge of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood, which they held until relieved later by the 2nd Gordons of the 20th Brigade. At the same time the village itself was cleared by the 2nd Warwicks, while the 1st Welsh Fusiliers drove the Germans out of the line between the windmill and the cemetery. The trench held originally by the Irish was retaken, and in it was found a British officer, who had been badly wounded and left for a time in the hands of the enemy. He reported that they would not dress him, and prodded at him with their bayonets, but that an officer had stopped them from killing him. No further attempt was made by the Germans to regain the position of Bazentin. The losses, especially those of the Royal Irish, had been very heavy during the latter part of the engagement.

Much had been done, but the heavy task of the Seventh Division was not yet at an end. At

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3.20 P.M. the reserve Brigade (91st) were ordered to attack the formidable obstacle of High Wood, the 100th Brigade of the Thirty-third Division (Landon) co-operating from the left side, while a handful of cavalry from the 7th Dragoon Guards and 20th Deccan Horse made an exhilarating, if premature, appearance upon the right flank, to which some allusion is made at the end of this chapter. The front line of the 91st Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Queen's Surrey and 1st South Staffords, marched forward in the traditional style of the British line, taking no notice of an enfilade fire from the Switch Trench, and beating back a sortie from the wood. At the same time the Brigadier of the 100th Brigade upon the left pushed forward his two leading battalions, the 1st Queen's Surrey and the 9th Highland Light Infantry, to seize and hold the road which led from High Wood to Bazentin-le-Petit. This was done in the late evening of July 14, while their comrades of the Seventh Division successfully reached the south end of the wood, taking three field-guns and 100 prisoners. The Queen's and part of the Highland Light Infantry were firmly in possession of the connecting road, but the right flank of the Highlanders was held up owing to the fact that the north-west of the wood was still in the hands of the enemy and commanded their advance. We will return to the situation which developed in this part of the field during the succeeding days after we have taken a fuller view of the doings upon the rest of the line during the battle of July 14. It may be said here, however, that the facility with which a footing was established in High Wood proved to be as fallacious as the parallel case of Mametz Wood, and that many a weary week was to pass, and many a



brave man give his heart's blood, before it was finally to be included in the British lines. For the present, it may be stated that the 91st Brigade could not hold the wood because it was enfiladed by the uncaptured Switch Trench, and that they therefore retired after dusk on the 15th.

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To return to the story of the main battle. The centre of the attack was carried out by the Third Division, one of the most famous units in the Army, though it now only retained three of the veteran battalions which had held the line at Mons. The task of the Third Division was to break the centre of the German line from Grand Bazentin upon the left where it touched the Seventh to Longueval on the right where it joined with the Ninth Division. The 8th Brigade was on the right, the 9th upon the left, while the 76th was in support. The attacking troops advanced in the darkness in fours, with strong patrols in front, and deployed within 200 yards of the German wire, capturing a German patrol which blundered into their ranks. Upon the word being given at the first faint gleam of dawn, the leading battalions trudged forward in the slow, determined fashion which had been found to be more effective than the spectacular charge. From the left the front line consisted of the 12th West Yorkshires, the 13th King's Liverpools, the 7th Shropshires, and the 8th East Yorks. The wire upon the right was found to be very partially cut, and the line of stormers was held up under a murderous fire. There were gaps here and there, however, so that the colonel at the head of his Shropshires was able to force a passage at one point, while two gallant platoons of the East Yorkshires got

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through at another, and pushed boldly on into the German line. The main body, however, were forced for a time to take cover and keep up a fire upon the enemies' heads as they peered occasionally from over the parapets.

The left brigade had been more fortunate, finding the wire to be well cut. The front trench was not strongly held, and was easily carried. Both the King's Liverpools and the West Yorkshires got through, but as they had separated in the advance the greater part of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers were thrust into the gap and restored the line. These men, supported by Stokes guns, carried the village of Grand Bazentin by 6.30 A.M. There was a deadly fire from the Grand Bazentin Wood upon the left, but as the Seventh Division advanced this died away, and the 12th West Yorkshires were able to get round to the north edge of the village, but could get no farther on account of the hold-up of the 8th Brigade upon the right. There was a considerable delay, but at last by 1 P.M. a renewed bombardment had cut the wires, and strong bombing parties from the supporting battalions, the 2nd Royal Scots and 1st Scots Fusiliers, worked down the front trench from each end. The whole brigade was then able to advance across the German front line, which was at once consolidated.

The losses in this attack had been heavy, the 12th West Yorkshires alone having 15 officers, including their colonel, and 350 men out of action. The results, however, were solid, as not only was the whole front of the German position crushed in, but 36 officers with 650 men were taken, together with four small howitzers, four field-guns, and fourteen machine-guns.

A counter-attack was inevitable and consolidation was pushed forward with furious energy. "Every one was digging like madmen, all mixed up with the dead and the dying." One counter-attack of some hundreds of brave men did charge towards them in the afternoon, but were scattered to the winds by a concentration of fire. The position was permanently held.

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The Ninth Division was on the immediate right of the Third, facing Longueval, a straggling village which lay against the sinister background of Delville Wood. The Division was, as will be remembered, the first of the new armies, and had distinguished itself greatly at Loos. It had been entirely a Highland Division, but it had undergone a picturesque change by the substitution of the South African Infantry Brigade in place of the 28th. The attack upon Longueval was carried out by the 26th Brigade, the 8th Black Watch and 10th Argyll and Sutherlands in the lead, with the 9th Seaforths in support and the 5th Camerons in reserve. The advance was so fine as to rouse the deepest admiration from an experienced French officer who observed it. "Who would believe," he wrote, "that only a few months ago not one of these men knew anything of the soldier's profession? They carried themselves as superbly as the Old Guard. Once I was near enough to see their faces as they deployed for attack under the devastating fire rained on them. . . . Their teeth were set and their eyes were fixed firmly on the goal towards which they were advancing. They were determined to achieve their object, and nothing but death would stop them. . . . Only those who were seriously hit thought of dropping out. The others



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pressed proudly on, regardless of the pain they suffered, and took part in the final charge in which the enemy were driven from the position." Such a tribute from a soldier to soldiers is indeed a glory.

The village and the trenches around it were taken with a splendid rush, but the fighting among the houses was of a desperate character, "more so," says the same observer, "than any I had seen before." The Germans refused to give or take quarter. When the Highlanders broke the line they cut off those who held the trench. The officer in command offered quarter. The German commander refused. "I and my men," he replied, "have orders to defend this ground with our lives. German soldiers know how to obey orders. We thank you for your offer, but we die where we stand." When the Highlanders finally took possession of the trench, all but a mere handful of the defenders were dead. It is episodes like this which would make us ready to take a German by the hand if it were not that his country's hand is red with innocent blood.

The defence was not everywhere equally desperate. As the Highlanders dashed past the trenches and into the scattered group of houses which marked the village, grey figures darted round corners, or rushed out with hands to heaven. Many prisoners were taken. Here and there groups of brave men sold their lives dearly, especially in some ruins at the east end of the village. The blast of fire from this place was so hot that for a moment the advance was staggered; but a brave piper ran to the front, and the joyous lilt of "The Campbells are coming" sent the clansmen flooding onwards once more. Neither bullets, bombs, nor liquid fire could stop

them, and the last German was stabbed or shot amid the broken walls of his shattered fort.

The main part or west of Longueval was now in the hands of the Scotsmen, but the place is peculiarly shaped, tailing away in a thin line to the northwards, the scattered houses in that direction being commanded by the wood, which runs right up to them on their southern side. It was clear that no complete conquest could be made until this wood also was in the hands of our stormers. The operation was a difficult one, and far too large to be carried out upon that day. The South African Brigade was therefore ordered up from Montauban, with instructions that they should attack Delville Wood at dawn of July 15.

Here we may break off the narrative of the battle of July 14, though it is difficult to do so, since these operations shade imperceptibly into each other, and the fighting never really came to an end. The main results, however, had become clear by that evening, and they amounted to a very great success, unalloyed by any failure. Every division had carried its point and added to its glories. Four villages, three woods, 6000 yards of front, and 2000 of depth had been added to our lines. Two thousand more prisoners had been taken, bringing the total for the fortnight to the substantial figure of 10,000 ; while twelve heavy and forty-two field-guns had also been taken during that time. Above all, the British had got their grip firmly upon the edge of the plateau, though many a weary day of fighting was to follow before the tenacious enemy had been driven from it, and the whole position was in British hands.

The reader is to understand clearly that though the operations of July 14 crushed in the face of the

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German line along the whole central position, the flanks both to the right and to the left were still inviolate. Upon the German right the whole range of powerful fortifications which extended through Pozières to Thiepval were untouched, while upon the German left the equally formidable line stretching from Longueval through Waterlot Farm and Guillemont to Falfemont Farm was also intact. It is correct, then, to say that the German second line had been stormed and penetrated, but it had not been captured throughout its full extent, and the greater part of the autumn campaign was to pass before this had been accomplished. The reduction of the German right wing will be recounted in the chapters which deal with Gough's army, to whom the task was assigned. That of the left wing is covered by the narrative, which gives some details of the numerous, bloody, and protracted attacks which ended in the capture of Guillemont.

Meanwhile a word may be said as to the operations of the First Division, who had been upon the left of the attack upon July 14, and had covered that flank without attempting an advance. Upon the night of July 15 they moved forward to attack the continuation of the German second line system between the captured Bazentin and the uncaptured Pozières. The attack was made by the 3rd Brigade, the 2nd Munsters being to the left, the 1st South Wales Borderers to the right, and the 1st Gloucesters in the centre with the 2nd Welsh in reserve. No less than 1200 yards of No Man's Land had to be crossed, but this was the more easy since both Pearl Wood and Contalmaison Villa were occupied. A daring daylight reconnaissance by the colonel of the



Gloucesters greatly helped the advance. The men were marched silently in platoons along the road, and then re-formed into line on the far side of the enemy's barrage, a manoeuvre which in the darkness called for great steadiness and discipline, the line being dressed on a shaded lamp in the wood. On the word the eager troops pushed on with such speed that they crossed the German front trenches and were into the second before their own barrage had properly lifted. Pushing forward again, they were soon some hundreds of yards past their objective, where they halted close to the formidable Switch Line, having occupied all of the second line system in their front. Their formation was now so dense, and they were so close to the German machine-guns, that there was a possibility of disaster, which was increased by the Welsh Borderers losing direction and charging towards a body of men whom they dimly saw in front of them, who proved to be the Gloucesters. Fine restraint upon both sides prevented a catastrophe. Officers and men were now keen to push on and to attack the Switch Line, from which flares were rising; but prudence forbade the opening up of an entirely new objective, and the men were drawn back to the captured German trenches. So ended a successful and almost bloodless operation.

It has been stated in the account of the action of July 14 that at one stage of the battle the cavalry advanced, but it was impossible to stop the description of a large movement to follow the fortunes of this small tactical stroke. None the less the matter was important, as being the first blood lost or drawn by cavalry, as cavalry, since the early months of the War. The idea was, that by a sudden move forward a small

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body of horse might establish itself in advance of the general line, and occupy a position which it could hold until the slower infantry came forward to take it over. This was actually done, and the movement may therefore be claimed as a successful experiment. The two detachments from the Deccan Horse and 7th Dragoon Guards galloped three miles from the rear, so as to be under observation as short a time as possible, passed swiftly through the lines of the astonished and jubilant infantry, and riding right into the enemy's position upon our right centre, established themselves in a strong point, and, aided by a friendly monoplane, beat off the German attacks. The advance was at six in the evening, and it was able to hold on until nightfall and to hand over in the early morning to the infantry. Some 40 Germans fell to lance or sabre, and a few were taken prisoners by the daring cavaliers, who suffered somewhat heavily, as they might well expect to do in so novel and desperate a venture.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

July 14 to July 31

Gradual advance of First Division—Hard fighting of Thirty-third Division at High Wood—The South Africans in Delville Wood—The great German counter-attack—Splendid work of 26th Brigade—Capture of Delville Wood by 99th Brigade—Indecisive fighting on the Guillemont front.

THE central fact of the situation after the battle of Bazentin was that although the second German line had been broken, the gap made was little more than three miles wide, and must be greatly extended upon either flank before a general advance upon the third line could take place. This meant that the left wing must push out in the Pozières direction, and that the right wing must get Ginchy and Guillemont. For the time the central British position was not an advantageous one, as it formed a long salient bending from High Wood through Delville Wood to Guillemont, so placed that it was open to direct observation all along, and exposed to converging fire which could be directed with all the more accuracy as it was upon points so well known to the Germans, into which the guns, communications, and reserves were now

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crammed. Sir Douglas Haig's great difficulties were increased by a long spell of wet and cloudy weather, which neutralised his advantages in the air. Everything was against the British General except the excellence of his artillery and the spirit of his troops. The French upon the right, whose tally of guns and prisoners were up to date higher than those of the British, had an equally hard front to attack, including the four strong villages of Maurepas, Le Forest, Raucourt, and Fregicourt, with many woods and systems of trenches. Their whole work in the battle had been worthy of their military history, and could not be surpassed, either in the dispositions of General Foch or in the valour of his men. Neither their infantry nor ours had ever relinquished one square yard that they had wrenched from the tight grip of the invader.

In each area of the battle of July 14 some pressing task was left to be accomplished, and the fighting was very severe at certain points for some days later. We shall first turn to the north of the line, where new divisions had come into action. One of these already mentioned was the First Division. It was indeed pleasing and reassuring to observe how many of the new divisional generals were men whose names recalled good service as regimental officers. Many who now wore the crossed swords upon their shoulders had been battalion commanders in 1914. It is indeed well with an army when neither seniority nor interest but good hard service upon the field of battle puts officers in charge of the lives of men.

The First Division had taken the place of the Twenty-third after the fall of Contalmaison, and had pushed its way up until it was level with the line of

their comrades on the right, whence in the manner described at the end of the last chapter they drove their line forward upon July 15. On the 20th they received a rebuff, however, the 1st Northants being held up by a very formidable German trench called Munster Alley. The ground already gained was consolidated, however, and the division lay with its left touching the Australians on the right of Gough's army, and its right connected with the Thirty-third Division, whose doings at High Wood will presently be considered. For the purpose of continuity of narrative it will be best to continue with a short summary of the doings of the First Division upon the left wing of the advance, their general task being to hold that flank against German counter-attacks, and to push forward wherever possible. It was continuous hard work which, like so many of these operations, could gain little credit, since there was no fixed point but only a maze of trenches in front of them. The storming of a nameless ditch may well call for as high military virtue as the taking of a historic village, and yet it seems a slighter thing in the lines of a bulletin. Munster Alley and the great Switch Line faced the First Division, two most formidable obstacles. On July 23, in the early morning, the 2nd Brigade of the First Division attacked the Switch Line, in conjunction with the Australians, on the left, and the Nineteenth Division to the right. The attack was held up, Colonel Bircham of the 2nd Rifles and many officers and men being killed. Colonel Bircham was a particularly gallant officer, who exposed himself fearlessly upon every occasion, and it is on record that when remonstrated with by his adjutant for his reckless disregard

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of danger, he answered, "You know as well as I do where a colonel of the 60th ought to be." Such lives are an example and such deaths an inspiration. Altogether the 2nd Rifles lost about 250 men in this night attack, and the other first line battalions—the 2nd Sussex, 10th Gloucesters, and 1st Cameron Highlanders—were all hard hit. The failure seems to have been partly due to misdirection in the dark.

Upon July 25 the 1st South Wales Borderers of the 3rd Brigade attacked Munster Alley, but were again unable to get forward on account of the machine-guns. Nothing daunted, the 2nd Welsh had another fling at Munster Alley next day, and actually took it, but had not weight enough to consolidate and to hold it. On the other hand, the British line was held inviolate, and a strong German attack upon July 25 towards Pozières was repulsed with loss.

The Twenty-third Division relieved the First and were in turn relieved by the Fifteenth in this sector, which faced the Switch Trench and Martinpuich. The Switch Line was exposed to a very heavy fire for several days, at the end of which it was attacked by this famous division, the same in number at least as that which had left nearly two-thirds of its rank and file upon the bloody slopes of Hill 70. On August 12 the advance was carried out with great dash: the 45th Brigade upon the left and the 46th upon the right. The attack was only partially successful, and the 46th Brigade was held up through the fact that the Germans had themselves been in the act of attack, so that the trenches were very strongly held. The operations continued, however, and the initial gains were enlarged, until



upon August 20 the whole Switch Line fell and was permanently consolidated.

Leaving this left sector we must turn to the Thirty-third Division on its right, two battalions of which had got forward on July 15, as far as the line of the road connecting High Wood with Little Bazentin. The right flank of the Highland Light Infantry had been held up by fire from this wood, and in the evening the 91st Brigade of the Seventh Division had evacuated the southern edge of the wood in order to allow of bombardment. That was the position on the night of July 15.

The line of the road was held all night, and early next morning the advance was ordered upon the German Switch Trench in front. It was hoped that the wood had been cleared during the night, but in the morning the Highlanders found themselves still galled by the continual fire upon their right. It was clear that the attack could not go forward with such an impediment upon the flank—one more instance of a brigade being held up by a handful of concealed men. It was hoped that the enemy had been silenced, and the attack was made, but no sooner had it developed than a murderous fire burst from the wood, making it impossible for the Highlanders to get along farther than the road. The 1st Queen's, however, being farther from the wood were able to get on to the Switch Trench, but found it heavily wired and stiff with men. Such a battalion does not take "No" easily, and their colonel, with a large proportion of their officers and men, was stretched in front of the fatal wire before it became evident that further perseverance would mean destruction. The 16th Rifles and half the 2nd Worcesters, the remaining

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battalions of the 100th Brigade, were brought up, but no further advance was possible until the wire could be cut by the guns. About four in the afternoon of July 16 the remains of the brigade were back in the road from which they had started. The attack had failed, partly from the enfilade fire of High Wood, partly from the impassable wire.

The 98th Brigade was on the left of the 100th, filling up the gap to Bazentin village. They had extended their right in order to help their sorely-tried comrades, and they had themselves advanced upon the line of the Switch Trench—the 1st Middlesex leading, with the 4th Suffolk in support. The 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands with the 4th King's Liverpool were in reserve. They got well forward, but ceased their advance when it was found that no progress could be made upon the right. Thus, for the time, the division was brought to a stand. That night the 19th Brigade relieved the 100th, which had been very hard hit in this action. After the change the 1st Scottish Rifles and the 20th Royal Fusiliers formed the front line of the 19th Brigade, the Rifles in touch with the 22nd Brigade of the 7th upon their right, while the Fusiliers were in touch with the 98th Brigade upon their left.

The general situation did not admit of an immediate attack, and the Germans took advantage of the pause to strengthen and slightly to advance their position. On July 17 the hard-worked Twenty-first Division upon the left was drawn out, and both the Thirty-third and Seventh had to extend their fronts. On the other hand, the First Division came in upon the left and occupied a portion of the Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The position at that time was

roughly that the Seventh Division covered the front from High Wood to Bazentin Grand, the Thirty-third Division from Bazentin Grand to Bazentin Petit, and the First was from their left to Pozières.

Upon July 18 there was a very heavy German attack upon Delville Wood, which is treated elsewhere. This was accompanied by a severe barrage fire upon the Bazentins and upon Mametz Wood, which continued all day. That night the Nineteenth Division came into line, taking over Bazentin Petit, both village and wood. The Thirty-third Division moved to the right and took some pressure off the Seventh, which had done such long and arduous service. These incessant changes may seem wearisome to the reader, but without a careful record of them the operations would become chaos to any one who endeavoured to follow them in detail. It is to be emphasised that though divisions continually changed, the corps to which they temporarily belonged did not change, or only at long intervals, so that when you are within its area you can always rely upon it that in this particular case Horne of the Fifteenth Corps is the actual brain which has the immediate control of the battle.

As the pressure upon Congreve's Thirteenth Corps on the right at Delville Wood and elsewhere was considerable, it was now deemed advisable to attack strongly by the Fifteenth Corps. The units for attack were the Thirty-third Division upon the left, and the depleted Seventh upon their right. There was to be no attack upon the left of the Thirty-third Division, but the 56th Brigade of the Nineteenth Division was handed over to the 33rd Division to strengthen the force. The objectives to

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be attacked were once again High Wood (Bois des Foureaux), Switch Trench, and the connecting trench between them. The Seventh Division attacked east of the wood on the line between it and Delville Wood.

The assault upon High Wood was assigned to the 19th Brigade. The 2nd Worcesters of the 98th Brigade were pushed out so as to cover the left flank of the assaulting column. At 2 A.M. of July 20 the two advance battalions of stormers, the 5th Scottish Rifles on the right, the 1st Scottish Rifles upon the left, were formed up in open ground outside the British wire. Preceded by scouts, they went silently forward through the gloom until they approached the south-western edge of the wood. A terrific bombardment was going on, and even those stout northern hearts might have quailed at the unknown dangers of that darksome wood, lit from moment to moment by the red glare of the shells. As the barrage lifted, the wave of infantry rushed forward, the 5th Scottish Rifles making for the eastern edge, while the 1st Regular Battalion pushed on in the endeavour to win through and secure the northern edge.

It was speedily found that the tenacious enemy had by no means loosened his grip of the wood. A portion of the Switch Trench runs through it, and this was strongly held, a line of spiriting flames amid the shadow of the shattered trees. Machine-guns and wire were everywhere. None the less, the dour Scots stuck to their point, though the wood was littered with their dead. Both to east and to north they slowly pushed their way onwards to their objectives. It was a contest of iron wills, and every yard won was paid for in blood. By 9 o'clock the whole of the

southern half of the wood had been cleared, the leading troops being helped by the 20th Fusiliers, who followed behind them, clearing up the lurking Germans. At that hour the northern end of the wood was still strongly held by the enemy, while the stormers had become much disorganised through loss of officers and through the utter confusion and disintegration which a night attack through a wood must necessarily entail.

The remaining battalion of the 19th Brigade, the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, was, at this critical moment, thrown into the fight. A heavy barrage was falling, and considerable losses were met with before the wood was entered; but the Fusiliers went forward with splendid steadiness and dash, their colonel taking entire local command. In the early afternoon, having got abreast of the exhausted Scottish Rifles, who had been under the hottest fire for nearly twelve hours, the Welsh attacked the north end of the wood, their advance being preceded by a continuous fire from our Stokes mortars, that portable heavy artillery which has served us so well. The enemy was still unabashed, but the advance was irresistible, and by 7 P.M. the British were for a time in possession of the whole of the blood-sodden plantation. It was a splendid passage of arms, in which every devilry which an obstinate and ingenious defence could command was overcome by the inexorable British infantry. The grim pertinacity of the Scots who stood that long night of terror, and the dash of the Welsh who carried on the wave when it was at the ebb, were equally fine; and solid, too, was the work of the public school lads of the 20th Fusiliers, who gleaned behind the line. So terrific was the shell-fire of the disappointed

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Germans upon the north end of the wood, that it was impossible to hold it; but the southern part was consolidated by the 18th Middlesex Pioneer Battalion and by the 11th Company Royal Engineers.

Whilst the Thirty-third Division stormed High Wood, their neighbours upon the right, the Seventh Division, depleted by heavy losses but still full of spirit, had been given the arduous and important task of capturing the roads running south-west from High Wood to Longueval. The assaulting battalions, the 2nd Gordons on the left and the 8th Devons on the right, Aberdeen and Plymouth in one battle line, advanced and took their first objective through a heavy barrage. Advancing farther, they attempted to dig in, but they had got ahead of the attack upon the left, and all the machine-guns both of Switch Trench and of High Wood were available to take them in flank and rear. It was a deadly business—so deadly that out of the two leading platoons of Gordons only one wounded officer and five men ever got back. Finally, the whole line had to crawl back in small groups to the first objective, which was being consolidated. That evening, the Fifth Division took over the lines of the Seventh, who were at last drawn out for a rest. The relief was marked by one serious mishap, as Colonel Gordon, commanding a battalion of his clansmen, was killed by a German shell.

It has been stated that the 56th Brigade of the Nineteenth Division had been placed under the orders of the Thirty-third Division during these operations. Its rôle was to cover the left flank of the attack and to keep the Germans busy in the Switch Line position. With this object the



56th Brigade, with the 57th Brigade upon its left, advanced its front line upon the night of July 22, a movement in which the 7th South Lancashires upon the right of the 56th Brigade were in close touch with the 2nd Worcesters upon the left of the 100th Brigade. Going forward in the darkness with German trenches in front of them and a raking fire from High Wood beating upon their flank the Lancashire men lost heavily and were unable to gain a footing in the enemy's position. This brigade had already suffered heavily from shell-fire in its advance to the front trenches. Two deaths which occurred during this short episode may be cited as examples of the stuff which went to the building up of Britain's new armies. Under the shell-fire fell brave old Lieutenant Webber, a subaltern in the field, a Master of Foxhounds at home, father of another dead subaltern, and 64 years old. In the night operation, gallantly leading his company, and showing his comrades in the dark how to keep direction by astronomy, fell Captain Gerard Garvin, student, poet, essayist, and soldier, just 20 years of age. A book might be written which would be a national inspiration dealing with the lives of those glorious youths who united all that is beautiful in the mind with all that is virile in the body, giving it unreservedly in their country's cause. They are lives which are more reminiscent of Sydney, Spencer, and the finer of the Elizabethans than anything we could have hoped to evolve in these later days. Raymond Asquith, Rupert Brooke, Charles Lister, Gerard Garvin, Julian Grenfell, Donald Hankey, Francis Ledwidge, Neil Primrose, these are some at least of this finest flower of British culture and valour, men who sacrificed to the need of the

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present their inheritance as the natural leaders of the future.

Though the Nineteenth Division was able to make no progress upon the night of July 22, upon the next night one of their brigades, the 58th, reinforced by two other battalions, made a strong movement forward, capturing the strong point upon the edge of the wood which had wrought the mischief the night before, and also through the fine work of the 10th Warwicks and 7th King's Own carrying the whole British line permanently forward upon the right, though they could make no headway upon the left. Some conception of the services of the Nineteenth Division may be gathered from the fact that during the month of July it had lost 6500 casualties.

The Thirty-third Division was given a well-deserved rest after their fine exploit in High Wood. During seven days' fighting it had lost heavily in officers and men. Of individual battalions the heaviest sufferers had been the two Scottish Rifle battalions, the 20th Royal Fusiliers, the 1st Queen's Surrey, 9th Highland Light Infantry, and very specially the 16th King's Royal Rifles.

Whilst this very severe fighting had been going on upon the left centre of the British advance, an even more arduous struggle had engaged our troops upon the right, where the Germans had a considerable advantage, since the whole of Delville Wood and Longueval formed the apex of a salient which jutted out into their position, and was open to a converging artillery fire from several directions. This terrible fight, which reduced the Ninth Scottish Division to about the strength of a brigade, and which caused heavy losses also to the Third Division, who struck

in from the left flank in order to help their comrades, was carried on from the time when the Highland Brigade captured the greater part of the village of Longueval, as already described in the general attack upon July 14.

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On the morning after the village was taken, the South African Brigade had been ordered to attack Delville Wood. This fine brigade, under a South African veteran, was composed of four battalions, the first representing the Cape Colony, the second Natal and the Orange River, the third the Transvaal, and the fourth the South African Scotsmen. If South Africa could only give battalions where others gave brigades or divisions, it is to be remembered that she had campaigns upon her own frontiers in which her manhood was deeply engaged. The European contingent was mostly British, but it contained an appreciable proportion of Boers, who fought with all the stubborn gallantry which we have good reason to associate with the name. Apart from the infantry, it should be mentioned that South Africa had sent six heavy batteries, a fine hospital, and many labour detachments and special services, including a signalling company which had the reputation of being the very best in the army, every man having been a civilian expert.

The South Africans advanced at dawn, and their broad line of skirmishers pushed its way rapidly through the wood, sweeping all opposition before it. By noon they occupied the whole tract with the exception of the north-west corner. This was the corner which abutted upon the houses north of Longueval, and the murderous machine-guns in these buildings held the Africans off. By night, the



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whole perimeter of the wood had been occupied, and the brigade was stretched round the edges of the trees and undergrowth. Already they were suffering heavily, not only from the Longueval guns upon their left, but from the heavy German artillery which had their range to a nicety and against which there was no defence. With patient valour they held their line, and endured the long horror of the shell-fall during the night.

Whilst the South Africans were occupying Delville Wood, the 27th Brigade had a task which was as arduous, and met in as heroic a mood, as that of their comrades on the day before. Their attack was upon the orchards and houses to the north and east of Longueval, which had been organised into formidable strong points and garrisoned by desperate men. These strong points were especially dangerous on account of the support which they could give to a counter-attack, and it was thus that they did us great mischief. The Scottish Borderers, Scots Fusiliers, and Royal Scots worked slowly forward during the day, at considerable cost to themselves. Every house was a fortress mutually supporting every other one, and each had to be taken by assault. "I saw one party of half-a-dozen Royal Scots rush headlong into a house with a yell, though there were Germans at every window. Three minutes later one of the six came out again, but no more shots ever came from that house." Such episodes, with ever-varying results, made up that long day of desperate fighting, which was rendered more difficult by the heavy German bombardment. The enemy appeared to be resigned to the loss of the Bazentins, but all their energy and guns were concentrated upon the recon-

quest of Longueval and Delville Wood. Through the whole of the 16th the shelling was terribly severe, the missiles pitching from three separate directions into the projecting salient. Furious assaults and heavy shell-falls alternated for several days, while clouds of bombers faced each other in a deadly and never-ending pelting match. It was observed as typical of the methods of each nation that while the Germans all threw together with mechanical and effective precision, the British opened out and fought as each man judged best. This fighting in the wood was very desperate and swayed back and forwards. "It was desperate hand-to-hand work. The enemy had no thought of giving in. Each man took advantage of the protection offered by the trees, and fought until he was knocked out. The wood seemed swarming with demons, who fought us tooth and nail." The British and Africans were driven deeper into the wood. Then again they would win their way forwards until they could see the open country through the broken trunks of the lacerated trees. Then the fulness of their tide would be reached, no fresh wave would come to carry them forwards, and slowly the ebb drew them back once more into the village and the forest. In this mixed fighting the Transvaal battalion took 3 officers and 130 men prisoners, but their losses, and those of the other African units, were very heavy. The senior officer in the firing line behaved with great gallantry, rallying his ever-dwindling forces again and again. A joint attack on the evening of July 16 by the Cape men, the South African Scots, and the 11th Royal Scots upon the north-west of the wood and the north of the village was held up by wire and machine-guns, but the German counter-

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attacks had no better fate. During the whole of the 17th the situation remained unchanged, but the strain upon the men was very severe, and they were faced by fresh divisions coming up from Bapaume. The Brigadier himself made his way into the wood, and reported to the Divisional Commander the extremely critical state of affairs.

On the morning of July 18 the Third Division were able to give some very valuable help to the hard-pressed Ninth. At the break of day the 1st Gordons, supported by the 8th King's Liverpools, both from the 76th Brigade, made a sudden and furious attack upon those German strong points to the north of the village which were an ever-present source of loss and of danger. "Now and again," says a remarkable anonymous account of the incident, "during a lull in the roar of battle, you could hear a strong Northern voice call out: 'On, Gor-r-r-dons, on!' thrilling out the r's as only Scotsmen can. The men seldom answered save by increasing their speed towards the goal. Occasionally some of them called out the battle-cry heard so often from the throats of the Gordons: 'Scotland for ever!' . . . They were out of sight over the parapet for a long time, but we could hear at intervals that cry of 'On, Gor-r-r-dons, on!' varied with yells of 'Scotland for ever!' and the strains of the pipes. Then we saw Highlanders reappear over the parapet. With them were groups of German prisoners."

The assault won a great deal of ground down the north-west edge of Delville Wood and in the north of the village; but there were heavy losses, and two of the strong points were still intact. All day the bombardment was continuous and deadly, until



4.30 in the afternoon, when a great German infantry attack came sweeping from the east, driving down through the wood and pushing before it with an irresistible momentum the scattered bodies of Scottish and African infantry, worn out by losses and fatigue. For a time it submerged both wood and village, and the foremost grey waves emerged even to the west of the village, where they were beaten down by the Lewis guns of the defenders. The southern edge of the wood was still held by the British, however, and here the gallant 26th Brigade threw itself desperately upon the victorious enemy, and stormed forward with all the impetuosity of their original attack. The Germans were first checked and then thrown back, and the south end of the wood remained in British hands. A finer or more successful local counter-attack has seldom been delivered, and it was by a brigade which had already endured losses which made it more fit for a rest-camp than for a battle line. After this second exploit the four splendid battalions were but remnants, the Black Watch having lost very heavily, while the Argylls, the Seaforths, and the Camerons were in no better case. Truly it can never be said that the grand records of the historic regular regiments have had anything but renewed lustre from the deeds of those civilian soldiers who, for a time, were privileged to bear their names.

Whilst this severe battle had been in progress, the losses of the South Africans in Delville Wood had been terrible, and they had fought with the energy of desperate men for every yard of ground. Stands were made in the successive rides of the wood by the colonel and his men. During the whole of the 19th these fine soldiers held on against heavy pressure.

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The colonel was the only officer of his regiment to return. Even the Newfoundlanders had hardly a more bloody baptism of fire than the South Africans, or emerged from it with more glory.

The situation now was that the south of the wood was held by the British, but the north, including the greater part of the village, was still held by the Germans. The worn-out Ninth Division, still full of spirit, but lacking sadly in numbers, was brought out of line upon July 19, and the Eighteenth English Division, fresh from its own great ordeal in Trones Wood, came forward to take its place. At seven in the morning of the 19th the 53rd Brigade attacked from the south, the situation being so pressing that there was no time for artillery preparation. The infantry went forward without it, and no higher ordeal could be demanded of them. It was evident that there was great danger of the strong German column breaking through to westward and so outflanking the whole British line. Only a British attack from north and from south could prevent its progress, so that the Third Division were called upon for the one, and the Eighteenth for the other. This wood of infamous memory is cut in two by one broad ride, named Princes Street, dividing it into two halves, north and south (*vide* p. 181). The southern half was now attacked by the 8th Norfolks, who worked their way steadily forward in a long fringe of bombers and riflemen. The Brigade-Major, Markes, and many officers and men fell in the advance. After a pause, with the help of their Lewis guns, the Norfolks pushed forward again, and by 2 o'clock had made their way up to Princes Street along most of the line, pushing the enemy down into the south-eastern corner. The

remaining battalions of the brigade, the 10th Essex on the right and the 6th Berkshires on the left, tried to fight their way through the northern portion, while the 8th Suffolk attacked the village. Half of the village up to the cross-roads in the centre was taken by the Suffolk, but their comrades on the right were held up by the heavy machine-gun fire, and at 5 P.M. were compelled to dig themselves in. They maintained their new positions, under a terrific shell-fire, for three weary and tragic days, at the end of which they were relieved by the 4th Royal Fusiliers, a veteran battalion which had fired some of the first shots of the War.

These Fusiliers belonged to the Third Division which had, as already said, been attacking from the north side of the wood, while the Eighteenth were on the south side. On July 19 this attack had been developed by the 2nd Suffolk and the 10th Welsh Fusiliers, the two remaining battalions of the 76th Brigade. The advance was made at early dawn, and the Welsh Fusiliers were at once attacked by German infantry, whom they repulsed. The attack was unfortunate from the start, and half of the Suffolks who penetrated the village were never able to extricate themselves again. The Welsh Fusiliers carried on, but its wing was now in the air, and the machine-guns were very deadly. The advance was held up and had to be withdrawn. In this affair fell one of the most promising of the younger officers of the British army, a man who would have attained the very highest had he lived, Brigade-Major Congreve, of the 76th Brigade, whose father commanded the adjacent Thirteenth Corps. His death arose from one of his many acts of rash and yet purposeful



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valour, for he pushed forward alone to find out what had become of the missing Suffolks, and so met his end from some lurking sniper.

On July 20 matters had come to a temporary equilibrium in Delville Wood, where amid the litter of corpses which were strewn from end to end of that dreadful grove, lines of British and German infantry held each other in check, neither able to advance, because to do so was to come under the murderous fire of the other. The Third Division, worn as it was, was still hard at work, for to the south-west of Longueval a long line of hostile trenches connected up with Guillemont, the fortified farm of Waterlot in the middle of them. It was to these lines that these battle-weary men were now turned. An attack was pending upon Guillemont by the Thirtieth Division, and the object of the Third Division was to cut the trench line to the east of the village, and so help the attack. The advance was carried out with great spirit upon July 22 by the 2nd Royal Scots, and though they were unable to attain their full objective, they seized and consolidated a post midway between Waterlot Farm and the railway, driving back a German battalion which endeavoured to thrust them out. On July 23 Guillemont was attacked by the 21st Brigade of the Thirtieth Division. The right of the attack consisting of the 19th Manchesters got into the village, but few got out again; and the left made no progress, the 2nd Yorkshires losing direction to the east and sweeping in upon the ground already held by the 2nd Royal Scots and other battalions of the 8th Brigade. The resistance shown by Guillemont proved that the siege of that village would be a serious operation and that it was not to be carried

by the *coup-de-main* of a tired division, however valiantly urged. The successive attempts to occupy it, culminating in complete success, will be recorded at a later stage.

On the same date, July 23, another attempt was made by mixed battalions of the Third Division upon Longueval. This was carried out with the co-operation of the 95th Brigade, Fifth Division, upon the left. The attack on the village itself from the south was held up, and the battalions engaged, including the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 12th West Yorkshires, and 13th King's Liverpools, all endured considerable losses. Two battalions of the Thirty-fifth Division (Bantams), the 17th Royal Scots and 17th West Yorks, took part in this attack. There had been some movement all along the line during that day from High Wood in the north-east to Guillemont in the south-west ; but nowhere was there any substantial progress. It was clear that the enemy was holding hard to his present line, and that very careful observation and renewed bombardment would be required before the infantry could be expected to move him. Thus, the advance of July 14, brilliant as it had been, had given less durable results than had been hoped, for no further ground had been gained in a week's fighting, while Longueval, which had been ours, had for a time passed back to the enemy. No one, however, who had studied General Haig's methods during the 1914 fighting at Ypres could, for a moment, believe that he would be balked of his aims, and the sequel was to show that he had lost none of the audacious tenacity which he had shown on those fateful days, nor had his well-tried instrument of war lost its power of fighting its way through a difficult

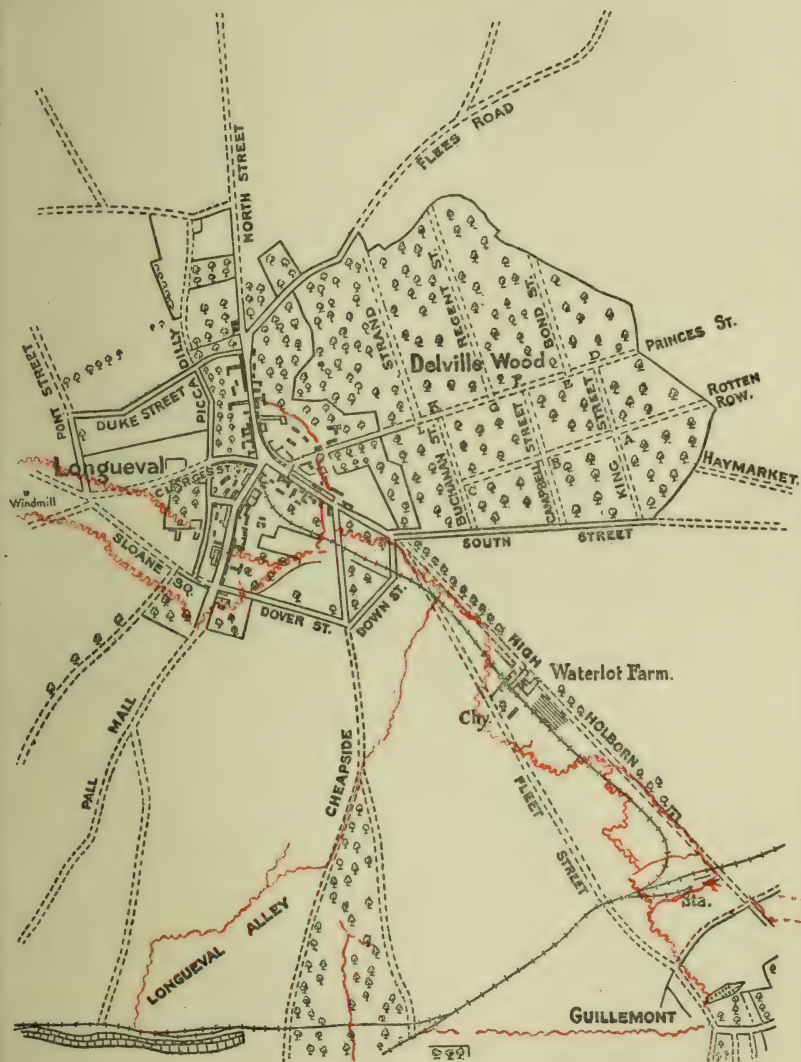
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position. The struggle at Longueval had been a desperate one, and the German return upon July 18 was undoubtedly the most severe reaction encountered by us during the whole of the Somme fighting; and yet after the fluctuations which have been described it finished with the position entirely in the hands of the British. On the days which followed the attack of July 23 the Thirteenth Brigade of the Fifth Division pushed its way gradually through the north end of the village, the 1st Norfolks bearing the brunt of the fighting. They were relieved on the 27th by the 95th Brigade, who took the final posts on the north and east of the houses, the 1st East Surreys holding the northern front. The 12th Gloucesters particularly distinguished themselves on this occasion, holding on to three outlying captured posts under a very heavy fire. The three isolated platoons maintained themselves with great constancy, and were all retrieved, though two out of three officers and the greater part of the men were casualties. This battalion lost 320 men in these operations, which were made more costly and difficult by the fact that Longueval was so exaggerated a salient that it might more properly be called a corner, the Germans directing their very accurate fire from the intact tower of Ginchy Church.

The Second Division had now been brought down to the Somme battle-front, and upon July 26 they took over from the Third Division in the area of Delville Wood. So complicated was the position at the point occupied, that one officer has described his company as being under fire from the north, south, east, and west, the latter being presumably due to the fact that the distant fire of the



# DELVILLE WOOD MAP



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British heavies fell occasionally among the front line infantry. At seven in the morning of July 27 the 99th Brigade, now attached to the Second Division, was ordered to improve our position in the wood, and made a determined advance with the 1st Rifles upon the right, and the 23rd Fusiliers upon the left, the 1st Berkshires and 22nd Royal Fusiliers being in support. Moving forward behind a strong barrage, the two battalions were able with moderate loss to force their way up to the line of Princes Street, and to make good this advanced position. A trench full of dead or wounded Germans with two splintered machine-guns showed that the artillery had found its mark, and many more were shot down as they retired to their further trenches. The 1st Berkshires held a defensive flank upon the right, but German bombers swarmed in between them and the Rifles, developing a dangerous counter-attack, which was finally beaten off after a sharp fight, in which Captain Howell of the latter battalion was mortally wounded after organising a splendid defence, in which he was greatly helped by a sergeant. At 11 o'clock the left flank of the advance was also very heavily attacked at short range, and the two companies of the Rifles on that side were in sore straits until reinforced by bombers from the 23rd Fusiliers, and also by the whole of the 22nd Fusiliers. The German barrage fell thickly behind the British advance, and it was a difficult and costly matter to send forward the necessary supports, but before evening part of the 17th Fusiliers and of the 17th Middlesex from the 5th Brigade had pushed forward and relieved the exhausted front line. It was a most notable advance and a heroic subsequent defence, with some of the

stiffest fighting that even Delville Wood had ever witnessed. The East Anglian Field Company Royal Engineers consolidated the line taken. The 1st Rifles, upon whom the greater part of the pressure had fallen, lost 14 officers, including their excellent adjutant, Captain Brocklehurst, and more than 300 men. The immediate conduct of the local operations depended upon the colonel of this battalion. The great result of the fight was that Delville Wood was now in British hands, from which it never again reverted. It is a name which will ever remain as a symbol of tragic glory in the records of the Ninth, the Third, the Eighteenth, and finally of the Second Divisions. Nowhere in all this desperate war did the British bulldog and the German wolf-hound meet in a more prolonged and fearful grapple. It should not be forgotten in our military annals that though the 99th Brigade actually captured the wood, their work would have been impossible had it not been for the fine advance of the 95th Brigade of the Fifth Division already recorded upon their Longueval flank.

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We shall now turn our attention to what had been going on in the extreme right-hand part of the line, where in conjunction with the French three of our divisions, the 55th Lancashire Territorials, the 35th Bantams, and the hard-worked 30th, had been attacking with no great success the strong German line which lay in front of us after the capture of Trones Wood. The centre of this defence was the village of Guillemont, which, as already mentioned, had been unsuccessfully attacked by the 21st Brigade upon July 23. About this date the Thirty-sixth Bantam Division had a repulse at the Malzhorn Farm



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to the south of Guillemont, both the 104th and 105th Brigades being hard hit, and many of the brave little men being left in front of the German machine-guns. A week later a much more elaborate attack was made upon it by the rest of the Thirtieth Division, strengthened by one brigade (the 106th) of the Thirty-fifth Division. This attack was carried out in co-operation with an advance of the Second Division upon Guillemont Station to the left of the village, and an advance of the French upon the right at Falfemont and Malzhorn.

The frontal advance upon Guillemont from the Trones Wood direction appears to have been about as difficult an operation as could be conceived in modern warfare. Everything helped the defence and nothing the attack. The approach was a glacis 700 yards in width, which was absolutely commanded by the guns in the village, and also by those placed obliquely to north and south. There was no cover of any kind. Prudence would no doubt have suggested that we should make good in the north at Longueval and thus outflank the whole German line of defence. It was essential, however, to fit our plans in with those of the French, and it was understood that those were such as to demand a very special, and if needs be, a self-immolating effort upon the right of the line.

The attack had been arranged for the morning of July 30, and it was carried out in spite of the fact that during the first few hours the fog was so dense that it was hard to see more than a few yards. This made the keeping of direction across so broad a space as 700 yards very difficult; while on the right, where the advance was for more than a mile and had to be co-ordinated with the troops of our Allies, it was so

complex a matter that there was considerable danger at one time that the fight in this quarter would resolve itself into a duel between the right of the British Thirtieth and the left of the French Thirty-ninth Division.

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The 89th Brigade advanced upon the right and the 90th upon the left, the latter being directed straight for the village. The two leading battalions, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers and the 18th Manchesters, reached it and established themselves firmly in its western suburbs; but the German barrage fell so thickly behind them that neither help nor munitions could reach them. Lieutenant Murray, who was sent back to report their critical situation, found Germans wandering about behind the line, and was compelled to shoot several in making his way through. He carried the news that the attack of the Second Division upon the station had apparently failed, that the machine-gun fire from the north was deadly, and that both battalions were in peril. The Scots had captured 50 and the Manchesters 100 prisoners, but they were penned in and unable to get on. Two companies of the 17th Manchesters made their way with heavy loss through the fatal barrage, but failed to alleviate the situation. It would appear that in the fog the Scots were entirely surrounded, and that they fought, as is their wont, while a cartridge lasted. Their last message was, that their ranks and munition supply were both thin, their front line broken, the shelling hard, and the situation critical. None of these men ever returned, and the only survivors of this battalion of splendid memories were the wounded in No Man's Land and the Headquarter Staff. It was the second time that the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers

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had fought to the last man in this war. Of the 18th Manchesters few returned, and two companies of the 16th Manchesters were not more fortunate. They got into the village on the extreme north, and found themselves in touch with the 17th Royal Fusiliers of the Second Division; but neither battalion could make good its position. It was one of the tragic episodes of the great Somme battle.

The 89th Brigade upon their right had troubles of their own, but they were less formidable than those of their comrades. As already described, they had the greatest difficulty in finding their true position amid the fog. Their action began successfully by a company of the 2nd Bedfords, together with a French company, rushing an isolated German trench and killing 70 men who occupied it. This was a small detached operation, for the front line of the advancing brigade was formed by the 19th Manchesters on the left, and by the 20th on the right, the latter in touch with the French 153rd of the line. The 19th reached the south-eastern corner of Guillemont, failed to get in touch with the Scots Fusiliers, and found both its flanks in the air. It had eventually to fall back, having lost Major Rolls, its commander, and many officers and men. The 20th Manchesters advanced upon the German Malzhorn Trenches and carried the front one, killing many of the occupants. In going forward from this point they lost 200 of their number while passing down a bullet-swept slope. Three out of four company commanders had fallen. Beyond the slope was a sunken road, and at this point a young lieutenant, Musker, found himself in command with mixed men from three battalions under his orders. Twelve runners sent back with messages were all shot,



which will give some idea of the severity of the barrage. Musker showed good powers of leadership, and consolidated his position in the road, but was unfortunately killed, the command then devolving upon a sub-lieutenant. The Bedfords came up to reinforce, and some permanent advance was established in this quarter—all that was gained by this very sanguinary engagement, which cost about 3000 men. The Bantams lost heavily also in this action though they only played the humble rôle of carriers to the storming brigades.

The whole of the fighting chronicled in this chapter may be taken as an aftermath of the action of July 14, and as an endeavour upon our part to enlarge our gains and upon the part of the Germans to push us out from what we had won. The encroachment upon High Wood upon the left, the desperate defence and final clearing of Delville Wood in the centre, and the attempt to drive the Germans from Guillemont upon the right—an attempt which was brought later to a successful conclusion—are all part of one system of operations designed for the one end.

It should be remarked that during all this fighting upon the Somme continual demonstrations, amounting in some cases to small battles, occurred along the northern line to keep the Germans employed. The most serious of these occurred in the Eleventh Corps district near Fromelles, opposite the Aubers Ridge. Here the Second Australians upon the left, and the Sixty-first British Division upon the right, a unit of second-line Territorial battalions, largely from the West country, made a most gallant attack and carried the German line for a time, but were compelled, upon July 20, the day following the attack,

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to fall back once more, as the gun positions upon the Aubers Ridge commanded the newly-taken trenches. It was particularly hard upon the Australians, whose grip upon the German position was firm, while the two brigades of the Sixty-first, though they behaved with great gallantry, had been less successful in the assault.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

#### The Operations of Gough's Army upon the Northern Flank up to September 15

Advance, Australia!—Capture of Pozières—Fine work of Forty-eighth Division—Relief of Australia by Canada—Steady advance of Gough's Army—Capture of Courcellette.

ALL the fighting which has been described was carried out by Rawlinson's Fourth Army, consisting of the Third, the Fifteenth, and the Thirteenth Corps. A new element was now, however, introduced upon the left flank. It will be remembered that Sir Hubert Gough had been given a Fifth or reserve army, consisting of the Eighth and Tenth Corps, with which to hold the flank. Of these, the Tenth, including the Forty-ninth, Forty-eighth, and First Australian Divisions, was now pushed forward into the fighting, with the intention of attacking Pozières and widening the British front.

This was the first serious appearance of the Australians upon a European battle-field, and it may be said at once that the high reputation which they had gained as dogged and dashing fighters in the Gallipoli campaign was fully endorsed in France.

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From General Birdwood, their admirable leader, down through every unit of their divisions, there ran an indomitable spirit, united to an individuality and readiness of resource which made them soldiers of the highest type. Their physique, too, was extraordinarily fine, and even the stay-at-home Londoner who had seen the lithe figures and the eager, clean-cut, aquiline faces under the broad-rimmed hats, bringing a touch of romance into our drab streets, would need no assurance that the men were splendid. A nation of sportsmen had changed themselves very easily into a nation of soldiers. Of all the strange turns of fate in this extraordinary war, surely there are few more quaint than that the black-fellow call of "Cooee!" should many a time have resounded at the crisis of a European battle.

As the First Australian Division lay upon July 22, it had the straggling and strongly entrenched village of Pozières in front of it. Upon the right they were in touch with the First Division filling the gap between Pozières and Bazentin, as described at the beginning of Chapter VII. On their left was the Forty-eighth Division of South Midland Territorials. The village had been reduced to a mere rubbish-heap by the guns, but was none the less dangerous on that account.

On the early morning of July 23, before it was light, the Australians made their first eruption into the Somme fighting. "The difficulty," as their chronicler truly declares, "was not to get the men forward, but to hold them." With an eager rush the men of New South Wales overwhelmed the front trench across the face of the village. It was dotted with German bodies, killed by the artillery. The

second trench in the village itself was found to be obliterated in places. It was occupied as far as possible after a sharp hand-to-hand fight, and daylight found the Australians, chiefly Victorians, in full possession of the southern and western end of the village. There was no counter-attack during July 23, and the day was spent in consolidating and in rounding-up prisoners from the dug-outs. For three days there was very heavy German shelling, but the division had served too long an apprenticeship to be shaken by such means. They lay low and held on tightly.

On Tuesday, July 25, came the first German attack, but it was broken up so completely by the British barrage that the Australians had only distant glimpses of the enemy infantry crawling from under the sleet which beat upon them. The merciless pounding of the bombardment continued, and then again in the late afternoon came another infantry attack, which was again scattered by the dominant all-observing guns. Up to now 150 prisoners, including two German colonels, had fallen into our hands.

Whilst the Australians had been attacking Pozières from the south, the Forty-eighth Division had made a similar advance from the south-west, and had made good the ground upon the left side of the Albert—Bapaume Road, including the western outskirts of the village and part of the Leipzig salient. In our admiration for our kinsmen from across the seas we must not forget, nor will they, that these lads from the very heart of rural England went step by step with them up Pozières Hill, and shared the victory which awaited them upon it.

The 143rd Brigade, consisting entirely of Warwick

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battalions (5, 6, 7, and 8), the 144th of Glosters (4 and 6) and Worcesters (7 and 8), and the 145th from Gloucester (5), Buckingham, Oxford and Buckingham (4), and Berkshire (4), took it in turns to surge up against the formidable German line, showing the greatest valour and perseverance, overcoming difficulty after difficulty, and always getting slowly forward from the first movement upon July 22, until upon July 26 they had overcome every obstacle and joined hands with the Australians at the cemetery which marks the north end of the village of Pozières. Many prisoners and a fine extension of the line were the fruits of their exertions. The 5th Royal Sussex Pioneer Battalion, amidst considerable difficulties and heavy shell-fire, consolidated all that had been won. The 4th Gloucesters and 7th Worcesters particularly distinguished themselves at this time by their persistent day-by-day work against the German trench line.

On the morning of July 26 the Australian advance was resumed. There were two obstacles immediately in front—the one a strong redoubt, the other a line of trench. The redoubt was most gallantly attacked by the men of Queensland and of South Australia, and was overwhelmed by their bombs. The Victorians, meanwhile, had won their way into the trench, but as it communicated by many runways with the main German system behind, an endless flow of reinforcements were able to come into it, and the length of the trench enabled the Germans to attack upon both flanks. It was a most bloody and desperate conflict which swung and swayed down the long ditches, and sometimes over the edges of them into the bullet-swept levels between. Men threw



and threw until they were so arm-weary that not another bomb could be lifted. If ever there were born natural bombers it must surely be among the countrymen of Spofforth and Trumble—and so it proved at that terrible international by Pozières village. A British aeroplane swooped down out of the misty morning, and gave signals of help and advice from above, so as to dam that ever-moving stream of reinforcement.

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The trenches in dispute were of no vital importance themselves, but they were the outposts of the great German second line which stretched behind its broad apron of barbed wire within a few hundred yards to the north-east of the village. The ground sloped upwards, and the Germans were on the crest. This was the next objective of the Australians, and was attacked by their Second Division on July 29. On the flank of the hill to the left the Victorians won a lodgment, but the main position was still impregnable—and almost unapproachable. Sullenly and slowly the infantry fell back to their own trenches, leaving many of their best and bravest before or among the fatal wires.

The position had been improved upon the left, however, by an advance of the Forty-eighth Division. The Warwick Brigade upon their right made no great progress, but the 145th Brigade upon the left took the trench in front of it and pushed that flank well forward. This successful attack was at seven in the evening of July 27. The leading battalions were the 4th Berks upon the right and the 6th Gloucesters on the left, and these two sturdy battalions captured all their objectives. A number of the 5th Regiment of the Prussian Guard were killed or captured in this

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affair. As the whole line had to turn half left after leaving the taking-off trench, it was a fine piece of disciplined fighting. General Gough was a personal witness of this attack.

On August 4, six days later, the Australians came back to the attack with all the dour pertinacity of their breed. This time their success was triumphant. A steady bombardment had laid the German front open, and in the dark of the night the Australian infantry, advancing over their own dead, rushed the position, surprising the Germans at a moment when a relief was being carried out. Many of the Germans who had been expecting a rest from their labours got one indeed—but it was in England rather than in their own rear. With the early morning the Australians were on the Pozières Ridge, and one of the few remaining observation posts of the enemy had passed from him for ever. In front of them was the land of promise—the long slope seamed by German trenches, the distant German camps, the churches and villages of that captive France which they had come so far to redeem.

Once again the left flank of the Australians was in close co-operation with a British Division. The Forty-eighth had been withdrawn and replaced by the Twelfth, a division which was rapidly acquiring a very solid reputation in the army. The men of the 7th Sussex upon the right and those of Surrey and of Kent upon the left were in the front of the battle-line, which rolled slowly up the slope of Pozières, continually driving the German resistance before it. The ground gained early in August was some 2000 yards of frontage with a depth of 400 yards, and though the whole ridge, and the Windmill

which marks it, had not yet been cleared, the fact that the British had a good foothold upon it was of the utmost strategical importance, apart from the continual stream of prisoners who fell into their hands. The Sussex battalion linked up with the Australians, and nothing could have been closer than the co-operation between the two, so much so that it is on record that with a glorious recklessness a bunch of Australians pushed forward without orders in order to keep the Sussex men company in one of their attacks. The South Saxons have again and again shown that there is no more solid military material in England. It is said that a rampant pig with "We won't be druv!" as a motto was an old emblem of that ancient county. Her sons assuredly lived up to the legend during the War.

On the morning of the 6th and of the 7th two counter-attacks stormed up to the new British line. The first was small and easily repelled, a sporadic effort by some gallant hot-headed officer, who died in the venture, clicking his Mauser to the last. The second was serious, for three battalions came very gallantly forwards, and a sudden rush of 1500 Germans, some of whom carried *flammenwerfer*, burst into the trenches at two separate points, making prisoners of some 50 Australians who were cut off from their comrades. The attack was bravely delivered in broad daylight, the enemy coming on in good line in the face of severe fire; but the Australians, with their usual individuality, rallied, and not only repulsed the enemy, but captured many of them, besides recapturing the prisoners whom they had taken. This was the supreme German attempt to recapture the position, but they were by no means able to



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reconcile themselves to the loss of it, and came on again and again in smaller assaults spread over several days, which had no result save to increase their already very heavy losses in this region.

This *flammenwerfer* attack had broken also upon the outposts of the 36th Brigade to the left, eight of these infernal machines coming forward with a throng of bombers behind them. The captain of the 9th Royal Fusiliers, instead of awaiting the attack in a crowded trench, rushed his men forward in the open, where they shot down the flame-bearers before they could bring their devilish squirts to bear. The bombers, who had followed the advance, led the flight. On this day 127 Germans who had been caught in a pocket between the British trenches were forced to surrender, after a very creditable resistance.

On August 12 the Twelfth Division attacked once more upon a broad front, the 35th Brigade upon the right, the 37th upon the left. The result of the attack was a satisfactory accession of ground, for although the Surreys and West Kents were held up, the Norfolks and Essex attained their objective and held it. Some 40 prisoners and a useful line of trench were the results. That night the 48th South Midlanders replaced the Twelfth Division once more, resuming their old station upon the left of the Australians, whose various divisions rang changes upon each other, men from every corner of the great island continent, from the burning plains of the Northern Territories to the wind-swept hills of Tasmania, relieving each other in the ever-advancing line of trenches and strong points which slowly ate into the German front. One day it was the West Australians who blew back an attack with their rifle

fire. On the next it was the Melbourne men who had rushed another position. On the summit of the Ridge was the stump of an old windmill, which lay now between the two lines, and it was towards this and along the slope of the crest that the advance was gradually creeping. It is worth noting that in this part of the line some sort of amenity was introduced concerning the wounded, and that neither party sniped the other so long as a Red Cross flag was shown. It is grievous to think that such a condition needs to be recorded.

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August 10 and 11 witnessed two night attacks by the 4th and 6th Gloucesters respectively, neither of which made much progress. The Territorials of the Forty-eighth Division still kept step, however, with the Australians in all that desperate advance up the long slope of Pozières Hill, the two units striving in a generous rivalry of valour, which ended in deep mutual confidence and esteem.

On August 14 the enemy counter-attacked with some vigour, and momentarily regained a trench near the windmill. On the 15th the line had been restored. On the 17th there was a strong attack in six successive lines upon the Forty-eighth British and the First Australian Divisions, but it had no result. On the 18th, however, the 5th and 6th Warwicks paid a return visit with great success, carrying three lines of trenches and capturing 600 prisoners. This was a very fine exploit, carried out at 5 P.M. of a summer evening.

It was about this date that a new movement began upon the British left, which extended their line of battle. Since the capture of Ovillers, a month before, the flank of the army to the left of the attack

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upon Pozières had been guarded by the Forty-ninth Division of Yorks Territorials, but no attack had been attempted in this quarter. On August 18 the Twenty-fifth Division relieved the Forty-ninth, and an advance upon a small scale which gradually assumed more importance was started in the direction of Thiepval, the German village fortress of sinister reputation, which lay upon the left flank on the hither side of the River Ancre. Upon this General Gough had now fixed a menacing gaze, and though his advance was gradual, it was none the less inexorable until his aim had been attained ; and not only Thiepval itself but the important heights to the north and east of it which dominate the valley of the Ancre were in the hands of his persevering troops. The first obstacles in his path were a stronghold named the Leipzig Redoubt, and to the east of it a widespread farm, now spread even wider by British shells. This nest of snipers and machine-guns was known as Mouquet Farm. Upon the 19th, as part of the general attack along the line, which will be more fully dealt with elsewhere, not only was our Pozières front pushed forward past the windmill for 300 yards, but the 1st Wiltshires of the Twenty-fifth Division, operating upon the left of the Forty-eighth, which in turn was on the left of the Australians, made an important lodgment on the high ground to the south of Thiepval. The Forty-eighth Division also made some advance, the 4th Gloucesters upon the night of the 19th capturing 400 yards of trench with 200 prisoners. Their comrades of the 6th Battalion had less fortune, however, in an attack upon the German trenches on August 22, when they had two companies partially destroyed by machine-gun fire, while every officer



engaged was hit, including Major Coates, who was killed. On this same day there was again an Australian advance near Pozières, whilst at the other end of the line, which was biting like acid into the German defences, the Twenty-fifth Division began to encroach upon the Leipzig salient, and were within 1000 yards of Thiepval. In this entirely successful attack a new invention, the push pipe-line, was used for the first time with some success, having the double effect of blowing up the enemy's strong point, and of forming a rudimentary communication trench in the track of its explosion. In this connection it may be stated generally that while the Germans, with their objects clear in front of them, had used before the War far greater ingenuity than the British in warlike invention, as witness the poison gas, *minenwerfer* and flame-throwers, their methods became stereotyped after War broke out ; while the more individual Britons showed greater ingenuity and constructive ability, so that by the end of 1916 they had attained a superiority upon nearly every point. Their heavy artillery, light machine-guns, aeroplanes, bombs, trench-mortars, and gas apparatus were all of the very best ; and in their tanks they were soon to take an entirely new departure in warfare. It is as difficult in our British system to fix the responsibility for good as for evil, but there is ample evidence of a great discriminating intelligence in the heart of our affairs.

The Hindenburg Trench was the immediate object of these attacks, and on August 24 a stretch of it, containing 150 occupants, was carried. A pocket of Germans was left at one end of it, who held on manfully and made a successful resistance against a

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company of the 8th North Lancashires, who tried to rush them. Ultimately, however, these brave men were all taken or killed.

Day by day the line crept on, and before the end of the month the 1000 yards had become 500, whilst every advance yielded some new trench with a crop of prisoners. The enemy was fully alive, however, to the great importance of the Thiepval position, which would give the British guns an opportunity of raking Beaumont Hamel and their other strongholds upon the north of the Ancre. A very strong counter-attack was made, therefore, by some battalions of the Prussian Guard on the evening of August 25, preceded by a shattering bombardment. The attack—the edge of which was blunted by the British barrage—fell mainly upon the 7th Brigade of the Twenty-fifth Division. The result was a German defeat, and the menacing line drew ever nearer to Thiepval, though an attack by the North Lances upon the Prussian Fusilier Guards upon August 28 was not successful. On the day before, however, the Forty-eighth Division upon the right of the Twenty-fifth made a successful advance, taking a good line of trench with 100 of the redoubtable Guards. Between Thiepval and Pozières the ruins of Mouquet Farm had been taken by the West Australians and the Tasmanians, and was found to be a perfect warren of snipers, so that it was some time before it was absolutely clear. On the Pozières Ridge ground and prisoners were continually being gained, and the trenches between the Ridge and Mouquet Farm were cleared by Queensland on the right and by Tasmania on the left. It was a most spirited fight, where Australian and Prussian stood up to each other within short bomb-throw. But

nothing could stand against the fire of the attack. The whole line of trench upon the right was captured. There was a dangerous gap, however, upon the Tasmanian left, and this the Tasmanians were compelled to endure for two days and nights, during which they were hard pressed by never-ending shelling and incessant German attacks. It is on record that their constant reports of their parlous state sent on to headquarters concluded always with the words: "But we will hold on." If Tasmania needs a motto, she could find no better one, for her sons lived and died up to it during those terrible hours. When at last they were relieved, their numbers were sorely reduced, but their ground was still intact. At the other side of the gap, however, the West Australians, hard pressed by an overpowering bombardment, had been pushed out from Mouquet Farm, which came back into German hands, whence it was destined soon to pass.

It was during this severe fighting that a little scene occurred which, as described by Mr. Bean, the very able Australian chronicler, must stir the blood of every Imperialist. A single officer "of middle age, erect, tough as wire, with lines on his face such as hard fighting and responsibility leave on every soldier," appeared in the Australian communication trenches, asking to see the officer-in-charge. He spoke the same tongue but with a different intonation as he explained his mission. He was the forerunner of the relieving force, and the First Division of Canada was taking over the line from Australia—a line which was destined to bring glory to each of them. Surely a great historical picture might be made in more peaceful times of this first contact of the two great nations



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of the future, separated by half the world from each other, and yet coming together amid blood and fire at the call of the race. An hour later, Canadian Highlanders in a long buoyant line were pushing swiftly forward to occupy the trenches which Australia had won and held. "Australians and Canadians," says Mr. Bean, "fought for thirty-six hours in those trenches inexorably mixed, working under each other's officers. Their wounded helped each other from the front. Their dead lie, and will lie, through all the centuries, hastily buried, beside the tumbled trenches and shell-holes where, fighting as mates, they died." So ended the Australian epic upon the Somme. It is to be remembered that the New Zealanders formed an entirely separate division, whose doings will presently be considered.

Whilst the Overseas troops had been fighting hard before Pozières, there had been a considerable movement upon their left to attack northwards along the Thiepval Spur. This was carried out by the Thirty-ninth Division north of the Ancre, the Forty-ninth and the Twenty-fifth upon September 3. Some ground was gained, but the losses were heavy, especially in the 75th Brigade, where the 2nd South Lancashires suffered considerably. This battalion had been in shallow trenches exposed to fire and weather for six days previous to the attack, and was greatly worn. This attack was part of the general battle of September 3, but from Mouquet Farm northwards it cannot be said to have given any adequate return for our losses.

Our narrative of the events upon the left wing of the army has now got in front of the general account, but as the operations of General Gough's force have

definite objectives of their own, the story may now be continued up to September 15, after which we can leave this flank altogether for a time and concentrate upon the happenings in the centre, and especially upon the right flank where Delville Wood, Ginchy and Guillemont had presented such impediments to the advance. At or about the time, September 4, when the Canadians took over the lines of the Australians at Pozières and Mouquet Farm, the Eleventh British Division, the First English Division of the New Army, which had come back from hard service in the East, relieved the Twenty-fifth Division upon the Canadian left. For a week there was quiet upon this part of the line, for a great forward move along the whole eleven-mile front had been planned for September 15, and this was the lull before the storm. On the evening before this great assault, the Eleventh Division crept up to and carried the main German stronghold, called the Wonderwork, which lay between them and Thiepval. There was some sharp bayonet work, and the defeated garrison flying towards Thiepval ran into the barrage so that the enemy losses were heavy, while the British line crept up to within 350 yards of the village. This advance stopped for ever the flank fire by which the Germans were able to make Mouquet Farm almost untenable, and the Canadians were able to occupy it. The capture of the Wonderwork was carried out by Price's 32nd Infantry Brigade of Yorkshire troops. The most of the work and the heaviest losses fell upon the 9th West Yorks, but the 8th West Ridings and the 6th Yorks were both engaged, the latter losing their colonel, Forsyth. The total casualties came to 26 officers and 742 men.

On September 15 the Eleventh Division held the

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flank in front of Thiépval, but the Second and Third Canadian Divisions shared in the general advance, and pushed forward their line over the Pozières Ridge and down for 1000 yards of the slope in front, joining hands with the Fifteenth Scottish Division in Martinpuich upon the right. This fine advance crossed several German trenches, took the fortified position of the Sugar Refinery, and eventually included in its scope the village of Courcelette, which had not been included in the original scheme. All Canada, from Halifax in the east to Vancouver in the west, was represented in this victory; and it was particularly pleasing that the crowning achievement—the capture of Courcelette—was carried out largely by the 22nd Battalion of the 5th Brigade French Canadians of the Second Division. French Canada, like Ireland, has been diverted somewhat by petty internal influences from taking a wide and worthy view of the great struggle against German conquest, but it can truly be said in both cases that the fine quality of those who came did much to atone for the apathy of those who stayed. Thirteen hundred German prisoners were brought back by the Canadians. During the Courcelette operations, the Third Canadian Division was working upon the left flank of the Second as it attacked the village, protecting it from enfilade attack. The work and the losses in this useful movement fell chiefly upon the 8th Brigade.

This considerable victory was, as will afterwards be shown, typical of what had occurred along the whole line upon that great day of battle and victory. It was followed, so far as the Canadians were concerned, by a day of heavy sacrifice and imperfect success. The Third Division, still operating upon the left of



the Second, endeavoured to carry the formidable Zollern Trench and Zollern Redoubt to the north of Courcellette. The 7th and 9th Brigades were in the attacking line, but the former was held up from the beginning. The latter got forward, but found itself confronted by the inevitable barbed wire, which stayed its progress. No good was done, and two gallant battalions, the 60th (Montreal) and the 52nd (New Ontario), lost 800 men between them. The operation was suspended until it could be renewed upon a larger scale and a broader front.

At this point we may suspend our account of the operations of Gough's Fifth Army, while we return to the Fourth Army upon the south, and bring the record of its work up to this same date. Afterwards, we shall return to the Fifth Army and describe the successful operations by which it cleared the Thiepval Ridge, gained command of the Ancre Valley, and finally created a situation which was directly responsible for the great German retreat in the early spring of 1917.

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

August 1 to September 15

Continued attempts of Thirty-third Division on High Wood—Cooperation of First Division—Operation of Fourteenth Division on fringe of Delville Wood—Attack by Twenty-fourth Division on Guillemont—Capture of Guillemont by 47th and 59th Brigades—Capture of Ginchy by Sixteenth Irish Division.

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AFTER the very hard fighting which accompanied and followed the big attack of July 14, continuing without a real break to the end of the month, there was a lull of a couple of weeks, which were employed by the German commentators in consoling articles to prove that the allied offensive was at an end, and by the Allies in bringing forward their guns and preparing for a renewed effort. The middle of August heard the drum fire break out again and the operations were continued, but on a local rather than a general scale. Many isolated positions had to be mastered before a general surge forward could be expected or attempted, and experience was to prove that it is precisely those isolated operations which are most difficult and costly, since they always mean that the whole concentration of the German guns can be turned upon the point which is endangered.

It will simplify the following operations to the reader if he will remember that the whole left wing of the army is excluded, being treated separately as Gough's flank advance. We only deal therefore with Rawlinson's Army. The front which faces us may be divided into several well-defined areas, each of which is in turn subjected to attack. There is High Wood on the extreme left, with the Intermediate Trench and the Switch Trench within it, or to its north. There is the line of trenches, Switch Trench, Wood Trench, Tea Trench, etc., linking up High Wood with Delville Wood. There is the north-eastern fringe of Delville Wood, there are the trenches between Delville Wood and Ginchy, there is Ginchy itself, there are the trenches between Ginchy and Guillemont, there is Guillemont itself, and finally there is a stretch of trench between Guillemont and the French left at Falfemont. This is the formidable barrier which was attacked again and again at various points between August 1 and September 15 as will now be told.

August 16 witnessed another attack by the Thirty-third Division upon High Wood, a position which had once already been almost entirely in their hands, but which had proved to be untenable on account of the concentration of fire which the German guns could bring to bear upon its limited space. None the less, it was determined that it should be once again attempted, for it was so situated that its machine-guns raked any advance between it and Delville Wood. The attack upon this occasion was carried out on the eastern side by the 98th Brigade, strengthened for the work by the addition of the 20th Royal Fusiliers and a wing of the 1st Middlesex. It might well seem depressing to the soldiers to be



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still facing an obstacle which they had carried a month before, but if this portion of the British line was stationary it had gained ground upon either wing, and it might also be urged that in a combat destined to be ended by military exhaustion it is the continued fighting rather than the local result that counts. If High Wood had cost and was to cost us dearly to attack, it assuredly was not cheap to defend; and if their artillery had made it too deadly for our occupation our own guns must also have taken high toll of the German garrison. Such broader views are easy for the detached reasoner in dug-out or in study, but to the troops who faced the ill-omened litter of broken tree-trunks and decaying bodies it might well seem disheartening that this sinister grove should still bar the way.

At 2.45 in the afternoon the infantry advanced, the 4th King's Liverpool upon the left and the 4th Suffolks on the right, keeping well up to the friendly shelter of their own pelting barrage. The enemy, however, had at once established a powerful counter-barrage, which caused heavy losses, especially to the King's, most of whose officers were hit early in the action. The two leading company commanders were killed and the advance held up. The Suffolks had got forward rather better, and part of them seized the German trench called Wood Lane to the south-east of the wood, but unhappily the only surviving officer with the party was killed in the trench, and the men being exposed to bombing attacks and to heavy enfilade fire from the eastern corner of High Wood were compelled to fall back after holding the trench for fifty minutes.

These two battalions had attacked upon the flank

of the wood. The wood itself was entered by three companies of the Argyll and Sutherlands, who found it laced with wire and full of machine-guns. The Highlanders stuck gamely to their task, and some of them—little groups of desperate men—actually crossed the wood, but their losses were heavy and, as is usual in forest fighting, all cohesion and direction became impossible. The whole attack was hung up. The 20th Royal Fusiliers, one of the public school battalions, was sent forward therefore to get the line moving once again. They shared in the losses, but were unable to retrieve the situation. So worn were the battalions that there was some question whether the 98th Brigade could hold its own line if there should be a vigorous counter-attack. The 19th Brigade was therefore brought up to support and eventually to relieve their comrades. The losses of the 98th amounted to over 2000 men, showing how manfully they had attempted a task which the result showed to be above their strength. The causes of the failure were undoubtedly the uncut wire in the wood, and that our gunners had been unsuccessful in beating down the machine-guns of the enemy.

Whilst the Thirty-third Division had been making these vigorous attacks upon High Wood, a corresponding movement had taken place upon the north side of the wood, where the First Division had come into line upon August 15, taking the place of the Thirty-fourth Division. They plunged at once into action, for the 2nd Brigade upon August 16 made a successful advance, the 1st Northants and 2nd Sussex pushing the line on for some hundreds of yards at considerable cost to themselves, and driving back a half-hearted

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counter-attack, which endeavoured to throw them out of their new gains. This attack was renewed with much greater weight, however, upon August 17, and both the 1st and 2nd Brigades were driven back for a few hours. In the afternoon they rallied and regained most of the lost ground. Immediately in front of them stretched a long German trench termed the Intermediate Trench, being the chief one between the second and third lines. Towards evening the 1st Brigade attacked this trench, the 1st Black Watch being the most advanced battalion. There was a hard fight, but the position was still too strong. Next morning, August 18, the gallant Highlanders were back at it once more, but the day was very misty, and the advance seems to have lost its exact bearings. The left company stumbled upon a pocket of 30 Germans, whom it took or killed, but could not find the trench. The right company got into the trench, but were not numerous enough to resist a very vigorous bombing attack, which re-established the German garrison. The 8th Berkshires pushed forward to try their luck, but a smoke cloud thrown out by a division on the left came drifting down and the attack was enveloped in it, losing both cohesion and direction. The Intermediate Trench was still German in the evening.

Although the 1st Brigade had been held up at this point the 2nd Brigade had made some progress upon their right, for a successful attack was made by the 1st Northhamptons and by the 1st North Lancashires upon a German trench to the north-west of High Wood. Colonel Longridge of the staff, a valuable officer, was killed in this affair, but the place was taken, and a strong point established. During the



night two platoons of the Northhamptons made an audacious attempt to steal an advance by creeping forwards 400 yards and digging in under the very noses of the Germans, on a small ridge which was of tactical importance. There was a considerable bickering all day round this point, the Sussex endeavouring to help their old battle-mates to hold the fort, but the supports were too distant, and eventually the garrison had to regain their own line.

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Upon August 20 there was a severe German attack upon the line of the First Division, which was held at the time by the 1st Northhamptons and the 2nd Rifles. The advance developed in great force, driving in the outpost line and part of the Northhamptons. The brave old "Cobblers" were a very seasoned battalion, and took a great deal of shifting from their shallow trench, hand-to-hand fighting taking place along the line. With the help of two companies of the Rifles the advance was stayed on the Northampton front; but a second attack developed out of High Wood upon the right flank of the Rifles. Two platoons under Lieutenant Stokes showed great gallantry in holding up this sudden and dangerous incursion. The platoons were relieved by the Gloucesters, but as there was no officer with the relief, Stokes remained on with the new garrison, and helped to drive back two more attacks, showing a splendid disregard for all danger, until he was finally killed by a shell. Captain Johnstone, who had led the Riflemen in their relief of the Northhamptons, was also killed, while Major Atkinson and 130 men of the Rifles were hit. The losses of the Northhamptons were even more heavy, but the German advance came to nought.

At the risk of carrying the account of the opera-

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tions near High Wood and between High Wood and the west edge of Delville Wood to a point which will compel a considerable return in order to bring up the narrative of the rest of the line, we shall still continue them to the date of the great advance of September 15, when the whole vast array from Pozières upon the left to Leuze Wood upon the right heaved itself forward, and local attacks gave place to a big concerted movement. We shall therefore continue to follow the fortunes of the First Division in their hard task in front of the Intermediate Trench. After the failure of their attempt to get forward upon August 19 the action died down, and for four days there was no fresh advance. The 3rd Brigade had come up into the front line, and upon August 24 the Munsters made an attempt upon the German trench without success. Colonel Lyon lost his life in this affair. Upon August 25 another battalion of the Brigade, the South Wales Borderers, made a bombing attack, and again were in the trench and once again were driven out. They were not to be denied, however, and upon August 26 actually occupied 180 yards of it, taking one of the deadly guns which had wrought such damage. On the 27th a German counter-attack was heavily repulsed, but an attempt of the South Wales Borderers to improve their success was also a failure. On the evening of this day the Fifteenth Scottish Division took over the position in front of the Intermediate Trench, the First Division moving to the right and enabling the Thirty-third Division upon its flank to move also to the right. The Fifteenth Division was able in very tempestuous weather partly to outflank the Intermediate Trench, with the result that upon the afternoon of August 30

the remains of the garrison, finding that they were in a trap, surrendered. Two machine-guns with 140 men were taken.

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Upon August 12 the Fourteenth Light Division, which in spite of its initial misfortune at Hooge had won the name of being one of the finest divisions of the New Army, came up into line. Its first station was in the Delville Wood area, which was still a most difficult section, in spite of our occupation of the wood. Orchards lay upon its fringes, and the German trenches around it swept the edges with fire, while several German strong points lay just outside it. An attempt was made by the Fourteenth Division to enlarge an area outside Longueval upon August 18. At 2.45 that day the 41st Brigade advanced upon the right of the Thirty-third Division with Orchard Trench as an objective, while the 43rd Brigade kept pace with them to the north and east of the wood. The German front trenches were carried without much difficulty, but, as usual, the process of consolidation was an expensive one. The men in small groups dug themselves in as best they could under fire from both flanks. The 7th Rifle Brigade upon the extreme left of the line was in the air, and their left company was almost entirely destroyed. The new line was held, however, and knotted together with three strong points which defied German attack. This was attempted upon the 19th, but was a total failure. In these operations the Fourteenth Division took 279 prisoners.

For the sake of consecutive narrative, the doings in the High Wood and Delville Wood district have been given without a break, but in order to bring the rest of the chronicle level one has to turn back a few



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days and turn our attention to the long right flank of the army, from Longueval in the north to Falfe-mont, where we joined on to the French in the south. The northern angle of this position was, as has already been explained, extremely disadvantageous to us, forming an almost fantastic peninsula, which jutted out into the German positions. Even if their infantry could not carry it, their guns could at all times rake it from three sides, and could command the whole Montauban valley, along which our supplies were bound to pass. Therefore it became very necessary to get more elbow-room along this line.

South-east of Delville Wood was the strongly-fortified village of Ginchy, and between the wood and the village were what may be called the Alcoholic system of trenches, where the long and powerful Beer Trench, stretching a few hundred yards north of the wood, was connected up with Vat Alley, Hop Alley, and Ale Alley, the whole forming a formidable labyrinth. To the south of Ginchy lay the very strongly organised village of Guillemont, which could not be approached save over a long quarter of a mile of open ground. Ginchy and Guillemont were linked up in a strong line, of which Waterlot Farm and Guillemont Station were two nodal points. South of Guillemont came Wedge Wood and finally Falfe-mont Farm, where the right of Rawlinson's Fourth Army joined on to the French. The whole of this long line was most powerfully defended, both by material appliances and by that constant human valour without which all appliances are useless. How to push it back was the pressing and difficult question which now faced the British commanders.

Guillemont had already been attacked upon

July 30 by the Thirtieth Division as described in a previous chapter. This attack had been most valiantly urged, but the losses had been heavy, and the gains small. The Second Division had relieved the Thirtieth on this point, and were in turn relieved upon August 10 by the Twenty-fourth, a division which had seen a good deal of rough service in that famous forcing-house for young soldiers—the Ypres salient.

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A few days later it closed in upon Guillemont with orders to reconnoitre and then attack. A partial attack was made upon August 16 upon the outskirts of the village by the 72nd Brigade, which was rather in the nature of a reconnaissance in force. The place was found to be very strong and the advancing troops drew off after incurring some losses, which were heaviest in the 9th East Surreys, who came under a blast of machine-gun fire, and dropped nine officers and over 200 men. The division drew off, broadened their front of attack, and came on again upon August 18 in a wide advance which covered the whole enemy line, striking not only at the village itself, but at the station, quarry, and farm to the north of it, covering a front of nearly a mile.

The 73rd Brigade attacked the village and the quarry. The right attack was led by the 13th Middlesex and supported by the 2nd Leinster, but it had no success, and ended in heavy losses, especially to the English regiment. The men who got across were unable to penetrate, and after a hand-to-hand fight were driven back. Upon the left of the brigade things went better. The attack upon that side was led by the 7th Northants, supported by the 9th Sussex. The Cobblers had lost their colonel from a

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wound in the morning. This colonel was the famous international three-quarter Mobbs, who gave one more illustration of the fact that the fine sportsman turns rapidly into the fine soldier. His successor had only been a few hours in command. The direction of the fight was none the less admirable. The Midlanders dashed with great fire across the 300 yards of open which separated them from the Quarries, while the Sussex crowded up into the advanced trenches, sending on company after company in response to demands for help. The British barrage had lifted, and it was no easy matter in face of the flank fire to get the men across, so that only a percentage reached the hard-pressed firing-line upon the other side. The colonel of the Sussex held back therefore, and sent his third company over as dusk fell, so that they came in on the flank of the North-amptons with little loss, while the fourth followed later with supplies. The lodgment made by the leading battalions was secured, and some ground to the north of the village passed into British hands.

Although Guillemont itself remained for the moment with the Germans, the assault of the Twenty-fourth Division had a success along the whole of the rest of the line and greatly improved the position of the British upon this flank. The 17th Brigade had attacked the station and after a severe fight had captured it, the 3rd Rifle Brigade especially distinguishing itself in this affair. Farther still to the north the line of trenches leading up to and in front of Waterlot Farm had fallen also to the 17th Brigade, the 8th Buffs having the heavier share of the work. These attacks, which cost the division



more than 3000 men, were carried out in co-operation with French attacks to the south and east of Guillemont, the net result being partly to isolate that stubborn village and turn it into a salient on the German line.

The Twenty-fourth Division was now drawn out for a short period, and the Twentieth replaced it and held firmly to the conquered line.

The Germans were acutely uneasy as to the erosion of their line which was going on from Longueval to Guillemont, and upon August 23 endeavoured to win back the ground gained at Guillemont Station, but their counter-attack, stronger as usual in its artillery preparation than in its infantry advance, had no success, though it cost the Twentieth Division some heavy losses. It was one clear sign of the degeneration of the German soldier that the overture should so continually be better than the performance. The machines were as formidable as ever, but the human element was slowly wilting, and that subtle sentiment was developing upon either side which means the ascendancy of one and the decline of the other. The ease with which the prisoners surrendered, the frequent failure to hold ground and the constant failure to gain it, all pointed to the same conclusion.

Upon August 24 a very widespread and determined attempt was made by the British to enlarge their area on the right wing, and the attack extended along the whole line to the north of Guillemont. It was carried out by three divisions, the Thirty-third which had side-stepped to the right, and now covered the ground to the immediate left of Delville Wood, the Fourteenth Light Division which covered the north of Delville Wood and the Alcohol system of trenches, and finally

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the Twentieth Division covering Ginchy and the rest of the line down to Guillemont.

Describing these operations from the left of our line the first unit of attack was the 100th Brigade, which had for its objective Tea Trench and other German defences which were to the north-west of Delville Wood. The Longueval—Flers road separated their right flank from the left flank of the 42nd Brigade of the Fourteenth Division. In order to carry out the attack the three leading battalions of the Brigade had to be crowded forward into a narrow front before daylight upon August 24.

All day they lay there, but towards evening the bombardment which they endured changed into an immense barrage which fell like a steel guillotine in front of our line, the British counter battery work being unable to check it. Shortly before 7 o'clock in the evening the leading companies of the attack belonging from the left to the 1st Queen's, 16th Rifles and 2nd Worcesters, crept forward until they were on the edge of the barrage. At 7 o'clock they took the plunge, advancing with brisk alacrity into that terrible pelt of missiles. By 7.30 the Queen's had established themselves in the German position and were bombing their way up Wood Lane Trench. The other two battalions had also at that hour got well forward, and the 42nd Brigade of the Fourteenth Division upon the right had been equally successful. The new positions were at once consolidated by the 9th Highland Light Infantry and by parties of the 222nd Field Company, together with the 18th Middlesex pioneers, under a very heavy fire. The Worcesters were in good touch with the 16th Rifles upon their left, but a considerable and dangerous gap had formed

between the left of the Rifles and the right of the Queen's—a gap which might have let in a fatal counter-attack had it not been for the admirable barrage of the artillery, which beat down each attempted advance. A trench was at once put in hand to link up the new line, the sappers labouring at it during the night, but the gap had not been entirely closed by the morning. The assaulting battalions were then relieved, and the 98th Brigade took the place of their comrades of the 100th. Thus ended this very successful little advance, the result being to push forward and strengthen our position between the two woods. The casualties were not high, and this fact was due to the fine co-operation of the guns, and to a very effective smoke barrage thrown out between the left wing of the attack and the machine-guns of High Wood.

The Fourteenth Division had advanced upon the immediate right of the Longueval—Flers road, the 42nd Brigade upon the left keeping in touch with the 100th, while the 41st Brigade upon the right had not only to reach its own objective, but to act as a protective flank against the Germans in the village of Ginchy. The 43rd Brigade was in reserve, but contributed one battalion, the 6th Yorkshire Light Infantry, to strengthening the reserve of the 42nd Brigade, whose formidable task was the carrying of the outlying fringe of Delville Wood. At last that tragic grove, the scene of such a prolonged struggle, was to be utterly cleared from our front. Three gallant battalions of the 42nd Brigade—the 5th Oxford and Bucks on the left, the 5th Shropshires in the centre, and the 9th Rifles upon the right—swept forward with the bayonet in the good old



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style and cleared it from end to end, helped greatly by the accurate barrage behind which they advanced. The German counter-barrage was heavy, but the troops tramped through it with no more deflection than if it had been a rainstorm, though a trail of dead and wounded marked their path. Every officer of the Rifle battalion was hit. The first barrier was a trench cut 150 yards from the north of the wood and called Inner Trench. This was taken at the first rush, the enemy surrendering freely. Two gallant N.C.O.'s of the Rifles, Sergeant Hamp and Corporal Ord, rushed up a machine-gun at the cost of their own lives. One party of 50 men of the enemy seem to have taken up arms again after three of the storming lines had passed, and to have blazed into their backs with a machine-gun, but a fourth line swept over them and all were engulfed. The Oxford and Bucks on the left of the line moved forward splendidly, picking up 200 prisoners as they passed, clearing the edge of the wood and digging in about 200 yards to the north of it, the 89th F Company Royal Engineers and the 11th King's Liverpool consolidating the position. The enemy's opposition upon the right flank had, however, been very much sterner and more successful, so that the flank battalion of the 42nd Brigade and the Rifle battalions of the 41st Brigade had all fallen short of their final objectives.

Altogether the day was a great success, for the losses were not excessive, and the gains though not sensational were general all along the line and prepared the way for the successful assaults of the next week. The fact that the right flank had not come on as far as the left, caused each successive battalion to find itself with its right flank exposed, but the line

was held by a clever readjustment under heavy fire, by which the flank battalions faced half right with the Oxforas still in the advanced position joining up with the Thirty-third Division, while the line slanting, but unbroken, sloped backwards to Inner Trench upon the right.

The eastern corner of Delville Wood was still dominated by a strong point, but upon the rain-swept evening of August 27 this was finally cleared out by the 43rd Brigade of the Fourteenth Division, the 6th Somerset, Yorkshire and Cornwall battalions of light infantry, together with the 10th Durhams, all doing good service.

The remains of the hard-worked Seventh Division had been thrust in front of those Alcohol trenches which still remained intact, filling up the gap separating Delville Wood from Ginchy. The 22nd Brigade was on the left, and shared in the advance of the 43rd, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers capturing Hop Alley, Beer Trench, and part of Vat Alley. The impending attack upon Ginchy, which was to co-operate with the attack upon Guillemont farther south, was forestalled and postponed by a very strong advance of the German infantry upon the north and north-east of Delville Wood. The 91st Brigade had relieved the 22nd, and the brunt of this attack outside the wood fell upon the 1st South Staffords, who repulsed the onslaught on three separate occasions, enduring a heavy shelling between each German advance. Upon the fourth attack the persevering German infantry succeeded in penetrating the north-east corner of the wood and regaining Hop Alley. The 2nd Queen's relieved the exhausted Staffords, and at noon of September 2 made a vigorous bombing attack which had some

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success, though the assailants were considerably mystified by the appearance of a party of Germans who had dressed themselves in the khaki and helmets taken the night before. This powerful attack fell also upon the Twentieth Division, and upon the Fourteenth to the right of the Seventh, but although it inflicted heavy losses, especially upon the 60th Brigade of the Twentieth Division, it failed to gain any ground or to obtain any strategic advantage.

On September 3 at noon the attack upon Ginchy was carried out by the 22nd Brigade, the 1st Welsh Fusiliers attacking to the north of the village, the 20th Manchesters moving on to the village itself, and the 2nd Warwicks on to the trenches to the west of the village. The Manchesters succeeded about one o'clock in forcing their way into the village, sending back 200 of the garrison as prisoners. The first rush behind the barrage sustained few casualties, and it was not until the Manchesters in their fiery eagerness began to push on beyond their mark that they ran into a very severe fire from the north, which mowed down their ranks, including nearly all their officers. The Welsh Fusiliers upon the left had been unable to get forward, and as a consequence the Manchester men were in so precarious a position and so reduced in numbers that they had to fall back through the village, while the 2nd Royal Irish, who had passed on as far as Ginchy Telegraph, had now to retire, as their rear was in danger. The 2nd Warwicks, however, held on to the south of the village, and refused to be dislodged, keeping their position there against all attacks until the night of September 5. In the afternoon, two companies of the Irish attempted to retrieve the situation by a renewed advance upon the



village, but their losses were heavy, and they could not get farther than the western outskirts. The casualties during the day were severe, and in the night it was thought advisable to replace the 22nd by the 20th Brigade. The latter made a fresh attack upon the village at eight in the morning of September 4 by the 9th Devons, but again it was found impossible, in the face of the inexorable machine-guns, to effect a permanent lodgment. The 2nd Queen's, however, on the left of the Brigade, improved our position at the north-eastern corner of Delville Wood. There was a short lull in the fighting, and then at 5.30 A.M. upon the 6th the 2nd Gordons stormed into the orchards round the village, but had to dig themselves in upon the western edge. At 2 P.M. they again attacked, aided by two companies of the 9th Devons, getting as far as the middle of the village, and capturing some prisoners, but the Germans came back with so heavy a counter-attack that the evening found our troops back in their own front line once more. On the night of September 7 the division was taken out—the 16th (Irish) and 55th moving up to the Ginchy Front.

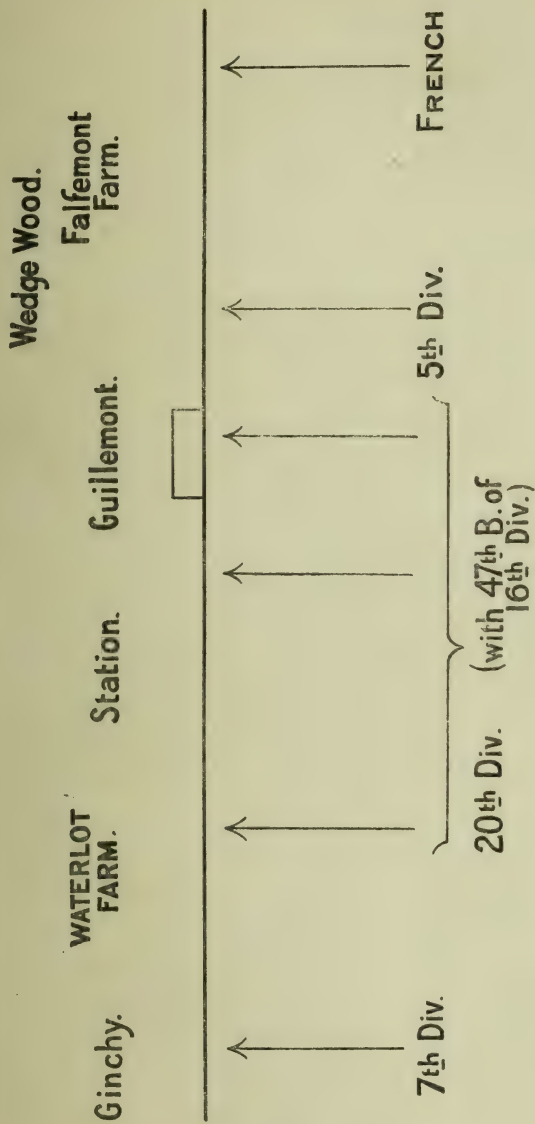
This severe fighting by the Seventh Division from the 3rd onwards was an excellent example of how a force may be called upon to sacrifice itself without seeing the object of its sacrifice until it learns the general plans of the Commander. The assaults upon Ginchy, unsuccessful at the moment, were of the greatest value as leading to the capture of Guillemont in the south. The task allotted to the Seventh Division was a very difficult one, involving an advance from a salient with the left flank exposed, and the magnitude of this task was greatly increased by the truly execrable weather. If no successful efforts were

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made to counter-attack upon Guillemont, the reason undoubtedly lay in the absorption of the German strength at Ginchy.

On this same day the battle raged from Ginchy along the whole right of our line through Waterlot Farm, Guillemont and Falfemont Farm to the left flank of the French. The annexed diagram will give some idea of the forces engaged and their several objectives on September 3.

As will be seen by this plan, the Fifth Division formed the unit next to the French, and the 13th Brigade were ordered to help our gallant allies in attacking the extreme southern point at Falfemont, while the 95th Brigade covered the ground between their comrades of the 13th and the village of Guillemont. The advance was made shortly after mid-day, and though the operations were long, bloody, and difficult, the famous old division, inheritors of the glories of Mons and Le Cateau, was not to be denied. The resistance was very strenuous, and only the most devoted constancy could have eventually overcome it. To follow the fortunes of the 13th Brigade first it may be briefly stated that upon Sunday, September 3, they first gained the Falfemont Farm, and then lost it again. That night they were reinforced by three battalions of the 15th Brigade, and were able next day to push in between the Farm and Guillemont, pressing the defenders upon every side. It was a widespread building, with many loopholed outhouses, and one of these fell after the other until only the central ruin, still spouting fire like an anchored battleship, remained in the hands of the defenders. Their position was hopeless, however, and by the morning of September 5 the changes in the line to the north



ATTACK ON GERMAN LEFT FLANK  
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of them, and especially the loss of Guillemont, caused them to evacuate the position.

The advance of the 95th Brigade upon the left of the Fifth Division had been a very gallant one, though the objectives which they so bravely won were nameless lines of trenches and a sunken road. The first line of the attack was formed by the 1st Duke of Cornwall's on the left, and the 12th Gloucesters upon the right, closely followed by the 1st Devons and 1st East Surreys. They were in close touch with the 59th Brigades of the Twentieth Division, who were attacking Guillemont upon their left. Within two hours of the first attack all three objectives had been captured, and the remains of the victorious battalions were digging in upon the line Ginchy—Wedge Wood. The losses were heavy in each battalion, but particularly so in the 12th Gloucesters. For a time they were under fire from both the British and the German batteries. Yet they held on to their ultimate objective, and the following extract from the impression which they produced upon an experienced regular colonel is worth quoting, if only to show the pitch of soldier-ship to which our amateur volunteers had reached. "The battalion came on in their extended lines as steadily as on parade, and, without wavering, though suffering heavy losses, passed through a hot German barrage in the most gallant manner. The lines were also much troubled by long-range machine-gun fire from the direction of Falfemont, but although gaps appeared and the lines were rapidly thinning out, I never saw the slightest sign of wavering. No troops could have carried through such a difficult task with more indifference to consequences." Gloucestershire was once the favourite forcing-ground for the cham-

pions of the British ring. The old fighting breed still lives. Altogether the 95th Brigade advanced 3000 yards in this action, and was responsible for the capture both of Wedge Wood and of Leuze Wood.

Upon the left of the Fifth Division the difficult task of storming Guillemont had been entrusted to the Rifle and Rifle Brigade battalions of the 59th Brigade upon the right, and to the 47th Brigade of the Sixteenth Irish Division. This brigade had come temporarily under the command of General Douglas Smith upon the left, taking the place of the 60th Brigade, which had lost heavily in strength from cold, wet, and continual German gassing and bombardment. The 61st was in divisional reserve. The attack was ordered for noon. Profiting by previous experiences it was planned that the whole village should not be rushed at once, but that the attack should proceed with method in three definite stages. The guns of the Sixth and of the Twenty-fourth Divisions joined in the preliminary bombardment. At noon, the infantry leapt over their parapets and charged home. The enemy was taken unawares. The 10th and 11th Rifle Brigade with the 10th and 11th King's Royal Rifles, supported by the 6th Oxford and Bucks, carried all before them on the south and west of the village, while the Leinsters, Connaughts, and Royal Irish did as much in the north. The Quarries, which was a nest of machine-guns, was taken in their stride. No more valiant or successful advance had been seen during the War, and it may take a place beside the attack of the 36th Brigade at Ovillers as a classical example of what British infantry can do with all the odds against them. The Riflemen fought in grim silence, but the Irish went through with a wild Celtic

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yell which, blending with the scream of their pipes, must have added one more to the horrors of the shaken and hard-pressed garrison. Neck and neck the two brigades, English and Irish, went through the German line. Hand-to-hand fights took place in the village, but all resistance was soon beaten down. By 12.30 the first objectives were solid, and at 1.20 the whole village was taken and the survivors of the enemy streaming out to eastward. The English losses were heavy and equally distributed. The Irish were also heavy, especially in the case of the 6th Connaughts, who also lost their colonel. At this time, through the failure of recruiting in Ireland, these brave battalions were below full strength, in spite of which within six days they stormed or helped to storm two of the strongest villages upon the line. One hardly knows which emotion is stronger—one's pride in those who went, or one's contempt for those who bided at home. No one admired the splendid dash of the Irish stormers more heartily than the British Riflemen, who kept pace with them in their desperate venture. Equally brave, they were more deliberate in their methods, with the result that more than once pockets of fighting Germans who had been overrun by the Irish, but were still venomous, were cleared up by the Riflemen on the flank. So infectious, however, was the fiery dash of the Irish, that Mr. Philip Gibbs has left it on record in one of his admirable letters that an English sergeant of Rifles complained that he had almost blown his teeth away in whistling his men back from overrunning their objectives. The garrison, it may be remarked, were chiefly Hanoverian, and once again our men were amused and amazed to see "Gibraltar" printed upon their hats, a reminiscence



of the days when they formed part of the British army. CHAPTER IX.

Whilst the attack had been in progress, two battalions of the 61st Brigade, the 7th Somersets and 12th King's Liverpools, were in close support, advancing steadily through the German barrage. The enemy were, as already shown, strongly held at Ginchy on the left flank of the Guillemont advance, but in spite of their preoccupations they made strong attempts at a counter-attack from this direction, which fell upon the Connaughts, who had been reinforced by two companies of the 12th King's. This small flanking force pushed out posts which behaved with great gallantry, holding off the enemy until evening, though at considerable loss to themselves. One of these posts, under Sergeant Jones of the 12th King's, was cut off by the Germans and held out for two days without food or water—a deed for which the sergeant received the Victoria Cross. On September 4 the positions were put into a state of defence, and on the 5th the Twentieth Division drew out of the line after their fine deed of arms.

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The Fourteenth Division had been in support upon the left during the attack upon Guillemont, and the 43rd Brigade had moved up to the northern edge of the village itself, losing a number of officers and men, including the colonel of the 6th Somersets, who, though badly wounded, remained with his battalion until it had consolidated its new position. A German advance was attempted at this point about 8 P.M., but the 43rd Brigade helped to drive it back. It may be said that the whole of September 3 was a series of small victories, making in

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the aggregate a very considerable one, and breaking down the whole of the flank German defences.

The Irish Division was now brought up to face Ginchy, the one point still untaken upon the German second line, whilst the Fifth Division pursued its victorious way up to Leuze Wood and to the lower corner of Bouleaux Wood, always in close touch with the French upon their right. The 47th Brigade of the Irish had already lost near half its numbers, and other units of the division, both infantry and sappers, especially the 7th and 8th Irish Fusiliers, had lost heavily in supporting the Fifth Division in its attack, but the battalions were still full of fight.

In the late afternoon of September 9 the final attack upon Ginchy by the Irish tore that village from the close grip of its Bavarian and Pomeranian garrison. The Fifty-fifth Division made a supporting attack upon the left, but the main advance was left for the now depleted but indomitable division. It dashed forward upon a two-brigade front, the 47th upon the right and the 48th upon the left, the brigades being strengthened by three battalions of the 49th, so that practically all the reserves were in the line from the start, but the commander had the comforting assurance that the Guards were moving up in his rear. On the right the first wave consisted of the 6th Royal Irish and the 8th Munsters, who dashed forward with great gallantry but were held up by machine-guns. The same fire held up the 1st Munsters upon the right of the 48th Brigade, but some natural cover was found which enabled them to continue to advance. On their left the 7th Irish Rifles and 7th Irish Fusiliers had broken into the German line in the first determined advance.

By six in the evening the 8th and 9th Dublins had reinforced the attack and had pushed on into the village, where the 156th Field Company Royal Engineers at once consolidated—a swift measure which was fully justified since two attacks stormed out of the darkness of the night and were beaten back into it again. Next morning the Sixteenth Division was relieved by the Guards and returned for the time from the line which they had so materially helped to enlarge and consolidate. Their losses had been heavy. Five battalion commanders were among the casualties. They fell out of the line upon September 10. A few days earlier the Fifth Division had been relieved by the Fifty-sixth.

The total effect of these operations had been to extend the whole British position for several thousand yards in frontage and nearly a mile in depth. At least 2000 more prisoners had fallen into our hands. The attack of July 14 had broken in the centre of the German second line, but the two flanks had held firm. The fall of Pozières upon our left before the Australians and the Forty-eighth Division, and of Guillemont upon our right before the Twentieth and Fifth, meant that the flanks also had gone, and that the whole front was now clear. A third strong line ran through Warlencourt and Le Transloy, but very numerous impediments—woods, villages, and trenches—lay in front of the army before they could reach it. It proved, however, that the worst impediment of all—vile weather and a premature winter—was to be the only real obstacle to the complete success of the army.

In order to complete this description of these widespread operations, which are difficult to syn-



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chronise and bring into any settled plan, one must return to what was going on upon the left of Delville Wood. Towards the end of August the Thirty-third Division, which had covered the line between Delville and High Woods, was relieved by the Twenty-fourth. Upon the left of the Twenty-fourth the First Division was still continuing that series of operations upon High Wood which have been already described. On their left in turn was the Fifteenth Scottish Division, the left unit of Rawlinson's Army. They were busy from this time onwards in digging their assembly trenches for the great assault.

The first incident which calls for attention was a very sudden and violent German attack upon August 31 upon the Twenty-fourth Division. The German onslaught met with some success at first, as it burst through the line of the 13th Middlesex, a battalion which had lost heavily in the attack upon Guillemont ten days before, and was for the moment more fit for a rest-camp than the forefront of the battle. The 9th Sussex, who were on the right of the Middlesex, stood firm, and the German advance, which had penetrated some distance down the long communication trench which is known as Plum Street, was eventually brought to a halt. This result was partly brought about by the initiative and determination of a 2nd Lieutenant of the Middlesex, "a little pale-faced fellow," who carried off a Lewis gun, and worked it from different positions down the trench, continually holding up the Germans and giving time for the Sussex men to gather such a force at the end of Plum Street as prevented the Germans from debouching into the larger trenches which led down towards Longueval. The attack had been equally

severe upon the 72nd Brigade, who held the right of the division, which included the northern end of Delville Wood. They entirely repulsed the Germans with great loss, the 8th Queen's Surrey being the battalion which bore the brunt of the fight.

On the next day, September 1, the 17th Brigade came up to restore the situation on the left, and by evening the position had been almost cleared. On the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th there were fresh German attacks, but the line was now firmly held and no impression was made. None the less, the fighting had been costly, and the depleted division had 2000 more names upon its roll of honour. It was drawn out shortly afterwards, but its artillery, which was left in the line, had the misfortune to lose its distinguished chief, General Phillpotts, upon September 8.

We shall now move a mile eastwards to follow the First Division in its difficult and, as it proved, impossible task of improving our position as regards High Wood, a spot which caused us more delay and loss than any other upon the German line.

On September 3 a strong attack by the whole of the 1st Brigade was made upon the wood, which was gridironed with trenches and studded with strong points. The immediate objectives were the main trench in the wood and the trenches to the south-east of the wood. The 1st Camerons, supported by the 8th Berks, advanced upon the right, the Black Watch, supported by the 10th Gloucesters, on the left. The attack had considerable success, which could not, however, be maintained. The battalions on the right won home, but the consolidating parties were delayed. On the left, the attack was only partially successful, being held up at a large mine-crater. When

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eventually a strong German counter-attack swept forward from the north-east of High Wood, the British had to fall back to their own original line, taking, however, 80 German prisoners with them. The ground had been won, but there had not been weight enough to hold it. The losses of the two Highland battalions were severe.

On September 8 the 3rd Brigade penetrated into the western part of High Wood, but again it was found impossible to make more than a temporary lodgment. The 2nd Welsh, 1st South Wales Borderers and 1st Gloucesters were all involved in this affair, as was the 9th Black Watch of the Fifteenth Division, who played a very gallant part. Next day the attack was renewed with the 2nd Brigade upon the right, the 3rd upon the left. In the centre the 1st Northants captured the crater, but were driven out of it later in the day, after a hard fight. On the left the Munsters and Gloucesters were held up by machine-gun fire. On the right the advance of the 2nd Sussex and of the 2nd Rifles met with gratifying success. The important trench called Wood Lane was stormed, with a loss to the assailants of a couple of hundred men, after the hostile machine-guns had been deftly put out of action by our trench-mortars. The Rifles were in touch not only with their comrades of Sussex upon the left, but with the 5th King's Liverpool upon the right, so that the line was complete. It was consolidated that night by the 1st North Lancashires and was permanently held, an attempt at counter-attack next day being crushed by our barrage. After this little victory the First Division was relieved upon the evening of September 10 by the New Zealanders.



## CHAPTER X

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

#### Breaking of the Third Line, September 15

Capture of Martinpuich by Fifteenth Division—Advance of Fiftieth Division—Capture of High Wood by Forty-seventh Division—Splendid advance of New Zealanders—Capture of Flers by Forty-first Division—Advance of the Light Division—Arduous work of the Guards and Sixth Divisions—Capture of Quadri-lateral—Work of Fifty-sixth Division on flank—Début of the tanks.

THE Army had been temporarily exhausted by its extreme efforts and the consequent losses, but was greatly buoyed up by the certainty that with their excellent artillery and their predominant air service they were inflicting more punishment than they were receiving. Steadily from week to week the tale of prisoners and of captured guns had been growing, the British and the French keeping curiously level in the numbers of their trophies. Fresh divisions, ardent for battle, were streaming down from the Northern line, while old divisions, already badly hammered, filled up rapidly with eager drafts, and were battle-worthy once again in a period which would have been pronounced absolutely impossible by any military critic before the War. All the rearward

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villages were choked with the supports. There was rumour also of some new agency to be used, and wondrous stories were whispered as to its nature and its powers. The men were in high heart, therefore, and by the middle of September Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which now included three corps, was ready to spring forward once again. The main German line was miles behind them, and the headquarters of British brigades and divisions now nested comfortably in those commodious dug-outs which two years of unremitting German labour had constructed—monuments for many a year to come of their industry and of their failure. It was realised that the obstacles in front, however formidable, could not possibly be so difficult as those which had already been surmounted; and yet our aeroplanes were able to report that the whole country was still slashed across and across in a fanciful lacework of intricate patterns in which fire, support, and communication trenches formed one great network of defence.

The left flank of the Army was formed by Gough's Fifth Army, which had pushed forward in the manner already described, the Second Corps (Jacob) and the Canadians (Byng) being in the line upon September 15. On their immediate right, and joining them in the trenches which face Martinpuich, was Pulteney's Third Corps, which covered the whole line down to High Wood. From the north-west of High Wood to the trenches opposite Flers, Horne's long-suffering Fifteenth Corps still urged the attack which it had commenced upon July 1. The units, it is true, had changed, but it is difficult to exaggerate the long strain which had been borne by this commander and his staff. An appreciation of it was shown by his

elevation to the command of the First Army at the conclusion of the operations. From the right of Horne's Corps to the point of junction with the French the line was filled by the Fourteenth Corps, under Lord Cavan of Ypres fame. In the movement, then, which we are immediately considering, it is the Third, Fifteenth, and Fourteenth Corps which are concerned. We shall take them as usual from the left, and follow the fortunes of each until their immediate operations reached some definite term. It is a gigantic movement upon which we look, for from the Eleventh Division in the Thiepval sector to the left, along ten miles of crowded trenches to the Fifty-sixth Division near Combles upon the right, twelve divisions, or about 120,000 infantry, were straining on the leash as the minute hand crawled towards zero and the shell streams swept ever swifter overhead.

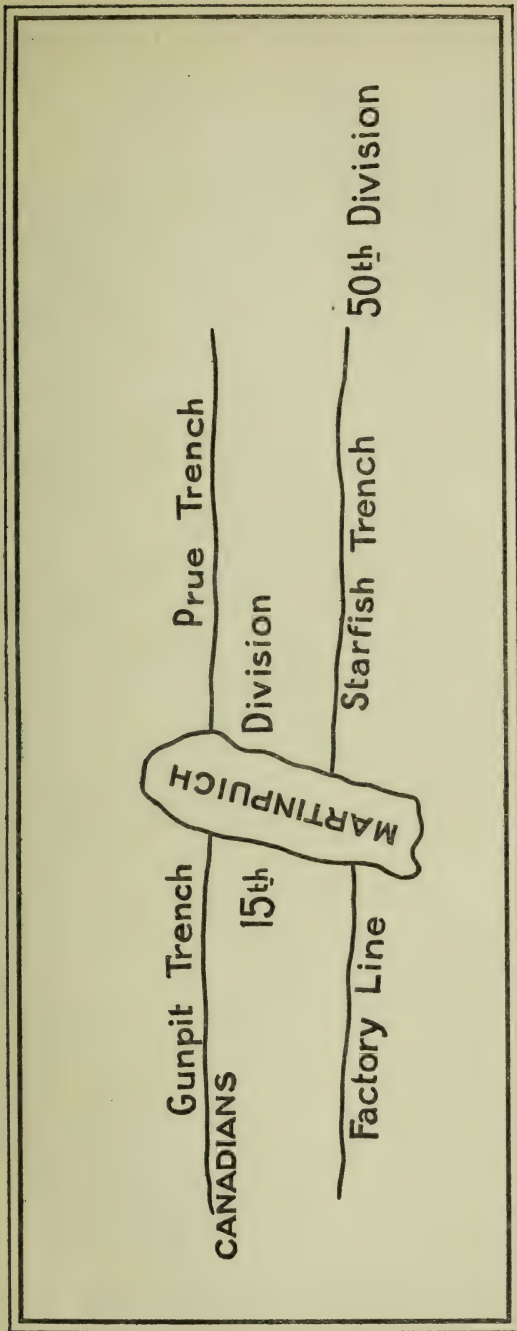
The three divisions which formed the Third Corps were, counting from the left, the Fifteenth, the Fiftieth, and the Forty-seventh. Of these, the Scots Division was faced by the strong line of defence in front of Martinpuich and the village of that name. The north of England territorials were opposite to the various German trenches which linked Martinpuich to High Wood. The Londoners were faced by the ghastly charnel-house of High Wood itself, taken and retaken so often, but still mainly in German hands. At 6.20 A.M. the assault went forward along the line.

The Fifteenth Division, which had been strengthened by the 103rd Brigade, advanced upon the line of trenches which separated them from Martinpuich, the 46th Brigade being upon the left and the 45th upon the right. The 10th Highland Light Infantry upon the left of the 46th Brigade were in close touch with



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the Canadians upon their left, forming the right-hand unit of Gough's Army. This brigade, consisting of Highland Light Infantry, Scots Borderers, and Scottish Rifles, swarmed over the German defences, while their comrades upon the right, including Royal Scots, Scots Fusiliers, Camerons, and Argylls, were no less successful. The fact that the whole line was engaged removed the old bugbears of enfilade fire which had broken up so many of our advances. The German barrage was heavy, but the advance was so swift and the close fight of the trenches came so quickly, that it was less effective than of old. A creeping barrage from the British guns, going forward at a pace of fifty yards a minute, kept in front of the infantry, whose eager feet were ever on the edge of the shrapnel. With the 44th Highland Brigade in close support the whole division swept roaring over the trenches, and with hardly a pause flooded into Martinpuich, where they met the fringe of the Canadians, whose main advance was to the north-west of the village. It was a magnificent advance, and the more noteworthy as the men of the 15th Division had already been for six unbroken weeks in the line, digging, working, fighting, and continually under shell-fire. Some groups of Germans in the village attempted a short and hopeless resistance, but the greater number threw their arms down and their hands up. It is said that a detachment of six Argylls got into Martinpuich some little time before their comrades, owing to some gap in the defences, and that they not only held their own there, but were found when reinforced to be mounting guard over fifty prisoners. Among many anecdotes of military virtue may be cited that of a sergeant of this same battalion, which combined within one



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episode all the qualities which distinguish the very best type of British soldier. He first attacked single-handed a number of German dug-outs. From one of these a German officer was emerging with his hands up. A soldier dashed forward in act to kill him, upon which the sergeant threatened his comrade with the bomb which he held in his hand. The German officer, as a sign of gratitude, presented Cunningham on the spot with his Iron Cross, which the sergeant at once despatched home to be sold for the benefit of the wounded. It was a quaintly beautiful exhibition of a noble nature.

Immediate steps were taken to consolidate the village and to connect up firmly with the Fiftieth Division on the line of Starfish Trench, and with the Canadians on the line of Gunpit Trench, the general final position being as shown in the diagram. The trophies upon this occasion amounted to 13 machine-guns, 3 field-guns, 3 heavy howitzers, and about 700 prisoners. There was a counter-attack upon the morning of September 16, which was easily repulsed: and afterwards, save for constant heavy shelling, the village was left in the hands of the victors, until a few days later the Fifteenth was relieved by the Twenty-third Division.

Whilst this brilliant advance had been conducted upon their left, the Fiftieth Division, the same north country Territorial Division which had done such vital service during the gas battle at Ypres, had carried the trenches opposed to them. They had no village or fixed point at their front with which their success can be linked; but it may be said generally that they kept the centre level with the two victorious wings, and that in the evening of September 15 they



extended from the Starfish trench on the left to the new position of the Forty-seventh Division upon the right. This position was a magnificent one, for High Wood had been finally taken, and the British line had been carried forward by these splendid London battalions, until in the evening the 140th Brigade upon the right had been able to join up with the New Zealanders upon the Flers line. Advancing upon a one-brigade front, with the 6th and 15th London in the lead, the London territorials, after one slight check, rushed the wood, and by 11 o'clock not only had it in their complete possession but had won 150 yards beyond it, where they consolidated. Two tanks which had been allotted to them were unfortunately unable to make their way through that terrible chaos of fallen trees, irregular trenches, deep shell-holes, and putrescent decay, which extended for a third of a mile from south to north. The wood now passed permanently into British hands, and the Forty-seventh Division has the honour of the final capture ; but in justice to the Thirty-third and other brave divisions which had at different times taken and then lost it, it must be remembered that it was a very much more difficult proposition to hold it when there was no general attack, and when the guns of the whole German line could concentrate upon the task of making it uninhabitable.

So much for the capture of High Wood by the Forty-seventh Division. Speaking generally, it may be said that each of the three divisions forming Pulteney's Third Corps was equally successful in reaching and in retaining the objectives assigned for the attack.

The dividing line between the Third Corps and

Horne's Fifteenth Corps was to the south of High Wood in the neighbourhood of Drop Trench. The order of the divisions in the latter corps from the left was the New Zealanders, the Forty-first Division, and the Fourteenth Light Division. We shall follow each in its turn.

The New Zealand Division had confirmed in France the high reputation which their predecessors had founded in South Africa, and which they had themselves renewed on the Gallipoli peninsula. They were troops with a splendid spirit, and no Londoner who has seen their tall lithe figures with the crimson hat-bands which distinguish them from other oversea troops, needs to be told how fine was their physique. They were fortunate, too, in a divisional commander of great dash and gallantry. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that in this, their first serious battle, they carried themselves with great distinction and made good the objective which had been assigned to them.

This objective was the famous Switch Trench between High Wood and Delville Wood, a section which was held by the Fourth Bavarian Division. Good as the Bavarians are, they had no chance when it came to close quarters with the stalwart men of Auckland and Otago, who formed the 2nd Brigade in the front line of the New Zealand battle. The machine-gun fire which they had to face was heavy and deadly, especially for the Otagos, who were on the left near High Wood. They poured on, however, in an unbroken array, springing down into Switch Trench, bayoneting part of the garrison, sending back the survivors as prisoners, and rapidly forming up once more for a fresh advance. The New Zealand Rifle

Brigade passed over the captured trench and lay down under the barrage 300 yards beyond it, whence at 6.40 they went forward upon a new advance with such impetuosity that they could hardly be kept out of the friendly fire in front of them. The next obstacle, Fat Trench, was easily surmounted, and by noon the Flers Trench and Flers Support Trench had both fallen to this fine advance. The village of Flers was not in the direct line of the advance, but the fringe of the New Zealanders passed through the edge of it, and connected up with the Forty-first Division who had occupied it.

When, as will presently be shown, the left-hand brigade of this division was temporarily driven back by a sharp German counter-attack, the New Zealanders were bare upon their right, while a gap existed also upon their left. In spite of this they held on to their advanced position to the north-west of the village, the line being strengthened by battalions from Wellington, Hawke's Bay, and West Coast, who pushed forward into the fight.

In the morning of the 16th the reserve brigade had come up and the advance was renewed as far as Grove Alley upon the left, the Canterbury battalion clearing and holding the new ground, with the Aucklanders and Otagos in immediate support. With this new advance the New Zealanders had come forward 3000 yards in two days—a notable performance—and were within short striking distance of the great German systems of Gird Trench and Gird Support. Two German counters that evening, one upon the Rifle Brigade and the other on the 1st Wellington battalion, had no success.

On the right of the New Zealanders was the Forty-



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first Division under one of the heroes of the original Seventh Division. His objective after surmounting the German trench lines was the fortified village of Flers. His artillery support was particularly strong, for his C.R.A. had under him the very efficient guns of the Twenty-first Division, as well as those of his own unit. The infantry advance was carried out with the 122nd Brigade on the left, the 124th on the right, and the 123rd in reserve. All the battalions save one were South of England, and most of them from the home counties, a district which has furnished some of the finest infantry of the War. As they advanced they were in close touch with the 2nd New Zealanders upon the left and with the 41st Brigade upon the right. The first objective, Tea Support Trench, was rapidly overrun by the Royal Riflemen, Hampshire, and Queen's Surrey battalions who formed the front line. The garrison surrendered. The continuation of Switch Trench stretched now in front of them, and both front brigades, with a ten minutes' interval in favour of the left one, made good the sections in front of them. The division was fortunate in its tanks, for seven out of ten got over the first line, and some survived for the whole day, spreading dismay in front of them and amused appreciation behind. The resistance was by no means desperate save by a few machine-gunners, who were finally scared or butted out of their emplacements by the iron monsters. Two tanks did good service, cutting the wire to the west of Flers Road, and the village was opened up to the stormers, who rushed into it shortly after eight o'clock. One tank went up the east side of the village and crushed in two houses containing machine-guns, while another

one passed down the main street; and yet another cleared up the west side. Nowhere upon this day of battle did these engines of warfare justify themselves so well as at Flers.

By ten o'clock the village was cleared and consolidated, but the German guns were very active, and there was a strong counter-attack from fresh infantry, which fell heavily upon the already worn troops who had now passed beyond the village and got as far as the Box and Cox trenches. There had been a large number of officer casualties. Shortly after ten o'clock an officer of the 18th King's Royal Rifles had got far forward with a mixed party of 100 men with some Lewis guns, and had established a strong point at Box and Cox, which he held until about one. During those three hours the shell-fall was very severe. The division had become somewhat scattered, partly owing to the street fighting in Flers and partly because the 124th Brigade upon the right, although it had kept touch with the 41st Brigade, had lost touch with its own comrades upon the left. Finding that its left flank was open, it fell back and took up the line of the Sunken Road, a quarter of a mile south of Flers, where it remained.

Meanwhile the 122nd Brigade was in some trouble. The pressure of counter-attack in front of it had become so heavy that there was a general falling back of the more advanced units. This retrograde movement was stopped by the Brigade-Major, who collected a section of the 228th Field Company of Royal Engineers, together with little groups of mixed battalions in Flers Trench, and sent them forward again, working in conjunction with the New Zealand 3rd (Rifle) Brigade to the north end of

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the village. Avoiding the centre of Flers, which was flaring and flaming with shells like the live crater of a volcano, these troops skirted the flank of the houses and by 2 P.M. had arrived once more at the north and north-west of the hamlet. Five Vickers guns were brought up, and the position made good by 2 P.M., the Brigadier-General being personally most active in this reorganisation of his line.

Whilst the 122nd Brigade had met and overcome this momentary set-back, the 124th upon the right had endured a similar experience and had come out of it with equal constancy. Shortly after one they had fallen back to Flers Trench, where they were rallied by their Brigadier, and moved forward again accompanied by some stray units of the Fourteenth Division. About 3 P.M. they were reinforced by two fresh companies of the 23rd Middlesex from the reserve brigade. By half-past four the whole of the remains of the division were north of Flers in a ragged but indomitable line, steadily winning ground once more, and pushing back the German attack. By half-past six they had got level with Flea Trench and Hogshead, and were close to the great Gird Trench. Some of the 124th tried hard to establish themselves in this important work, but lost heavily from a machine-gun established in a cornfield upon their right. At seven o'clock the advanced line was consolidated, and the scattered units reorganised so far as the want of officers would permit. Very many of the latter, including Colonel Ash of the 23rd Middlesex, had been killed or wounded. The 11th Queen's, from the reserve brigade, was sent up to strengthen the front posts, while an officer of the same battalion was placed in charge of the Flers defences. No



tank was left intact in the evening, but they had amply justified themselves and done brilliant work in this section of the battlefield.

The morning of September 16 saw a forward movement in this quarter upon the Gird Trench, which was shared in by the divisions upon both wings. The 64th Brigade of the Twenty-first Division had been placed under the orders of the General commanding the Forty-first for the purpose of this attack, so that the subsequent losses fell upon the North-countrymen. The advance got forward about 200 yards and established itself close to the great trench, but the losses were heavy, the machine-guns active, and farther progress was for the moment impossible. The 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry and 15th Durham Light Infantry were the chief sufferers in this affair. Upon September 17 the Fifty-fifth Division relieved the Forty-first, whose record for the battle was certainly a glorious one, as in one day they had taken Tea Support, Switch Trench, Flers Trench, Flers village, Box and Cox and Flea Trench, any one of which might be considered an achievement. How great their efforts were may be measured by the fact that nearly 50 per cent had fallen. The losses of the 124th were almost as heavy, and those of the 123rd were considerable. Altogether 149 officers out of 251 and 2994 out of about 7500 were killed or wounded. The opponents both of the Forty-first and of the Fourteenth Divisions were the Fifth Bavarian Division, who held the German line from Flers to Ginchy, and must have been well-nigh annihilated in the action.

The story of the Fourteenth Light Division has been to some extent told in recounting the experiences

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of the Forty-first Division, as the two advanced side by side upon prolongations of the same trenches, with equal dangers and equal successes. No village fell within the sphere of their actual operations, though a complete victory would have brought them to Guedecourt, but it was part of their task to sweep up the German trenches to the north of Delville Wood, especially the Tea Support and the Switch Trench. This task was committed to the 41st Brigade, consisting entirely of Rifle Brigade or Royal Rifle Battalions. The advance was for 500 yards downhill, and then up a long slope of 700 yards, which leads to a plateau about 200 yards across, with the Switch Trench in the centre of it. The Riflemen swept over this space with a splendid dash which showed that they had inherited all those qualities of the old 60th which were cultivated by Sir John Moore and celebrated by Napier, qualities which were always shared by their comrades of the Rifle Brigade. Regardless of the enemy's fire, and so eager that they occasionally were struck on the backs by their own shrapnel, the long thin lines pushed forward in perfect formation, the 8th Rifles and 8th Rifle Brigade in front, with the 7th Battalions of the same regiments in close support.

By ten o'clock they had cleared the network of trenches in front of them and gone forward 2000 yards. The main attack was carried on by the 42nd Brigade, composed also of Riflemen with the 5th Oxford and Bucks and 5th Shropshires. This brigade pushed on, keeping in close touch with the Forty-first Division upon the left, but gradually losing touch with the Guards upon their right, so that a dangerous gap was created. It was covered by the

7th Divisional Artillery as well as by its own guns. In its advance it passed through the ranks of its fellow-brigade, which had cleared the first trenches up to and including the line of the Switch Trench. The front line from the left consisted of the 5th Shropshires and 9th Rifle Brigade, with the 5th Oxford and Bucks and 9th Rifles behind. From the beginning the brigade was under heavy fire, and the colonel of the Oxfords was twice wounded, which did not prevent him from still leading his battalion. The first obstacle, Gap Trench, was safely carried, and the line swept onwards to Bulls Road where they were cheered by the sight of a tank engaging and silencing a German battery, though it was itself destroyed in the moment of victory. The losses in the two rifle battalions were especially heavy as the right flank was exposed owing to the gap which had formed. This deadly fire held up the flank, with the result that the Shropshires and Oxfords who were less exposed to it soon found themselves considerably in advance of their comrades, where they formed a line which was extended about mid-day by the arrival of the 9th Rifles. At this period large reinforcements of the enemy were seen flocking into Gird Trench and Gird Support Trench in front. So strong were they that they attempted a counter-attack upon the right front of the 42nd Brigade, but this was brought to a stand, and finally broken up by rifle and Lewis-gun fire. The supporting 43rd Brigade came up in the evening and took over the ground gained, together with four German guns which had been captured. The final result, therefore, was that the division had won its way to the edge of that Gird Trench which represented the next great task which should be attempted



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by the Army—a task which, as already shown, was attempted by three divisions upon the morning of September 16, but proved to be too formidable for their depleted and wearied ranks.

This fine advance of the Fourteenth Division brought them over the low ridge which had faced them. “It was a grand sight,” says a Rifleman, “to see the promised land lying green at one’s feet, with Germans moving across the open, and ammunition waggons going at a trot to and from their batteries, but the grandest sight of the day was seeing the battalions advance, the men dancing along only too anxious to get to close grips with the enemy.”

Among many brave deeds recorded of the division there was none finer than those of a captain and a corporal, both of the Medical Service, who stayed in the open all day in spite of wounds, tending those who were hardly worse than themselves.

On the evening of September 16 there was an advance of the 43rd Brigade, consisting of Somerset, Durham, Cornish, and Yorkshire Light Infantry, which succeeded in establishing itself in the Gird Trench, though they found it impossible to get as far as the Gird Support. This successful advance was supported by the Shropshire and Oxford battalions of the 42nd Brigade, who established flank protections and got into touch with the Guards in Gap Trench upon the right. The Fourteenth Division was withdrawn from the line after this, and their place taken by the Twenty-first.

We have now briefly considered the operations carried out during this great battle by Horne’s Fifteenth Corps. Upon their right, stretching from the neighbourhood of Ginchy to the left of the French

Army in the neighbourhood of Combles, was Cavan's Fourteenth Corps, which contained in its battle line the Guards, the Sixth Division, and the 56th London Territorial Division. Taking them, as always, from the left, we will begin by tracing the progress of the Guards.

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The Guards Division had taken over the Ginchy Section some days previously from the Irish Division, and had at once found themselves involved in very heavy fighting, which left them a good deal weakened for the great advance. They were faced by a strong system of trenches, and especially by one stronghold upon their right front, called the Quadrilateral, which was a most formidable thorn, not only in their side but also in that of the Sixth Division upon the right. On September 13 and 14 these two divisions strove hard, and sustained heavy losses in the endeavour to clear their front of, and to outflank, this serious obstacle, and some account of these preliminary operations may be here introduced, although, as explained, they were antecedent to the general engagement. The attack upon the German trenches on the evening of September 13 was begun by the Sixth Division, which advanced with the 71st Brigade upon the left, the Sixteenth upon the right, and the Eighteenth in reserve. For 500 yards the advance was successful until it reached the sunken road which leads from Ginchy to Leuze Wood. Here the leading battalions of the 71st Brigade, the 2nd Sherwood Foresters upon the left and the 9th Suffolk upon the right, were held up by a furious fire which caused them heavy losses. The 8th Bedford, one of the leading battalions of the 16th Brigade, was also heavily punished. Many

officers fell, including Major Mack of the Suffolks, a civilian-bred soldier over sixty years of age, who had distinguished himself by his fiery courage. The 2nd Brigade of Guards had advanced upon the left, near Ginchy Telegraph, and had also forced their way as far as the road, where they were held up partly by a terrific barrage from the north-east and partly by the murderous fire from the Quadrangle. The whole line dug in upon the ground they had won and waited for a farther push in the morning. In this action No. 2 Company of the 2nd Irish Guards suffered heavy casualties from close-range fire.

On September 14 a second attempt was made to get forward, the action being a purely local one, but extending over a considerable space from Ginchy to near Leuze Wood, with its centre on the line of Ginchy Telegraph. The 3rd Brigade of Guards came into action this morning and made some progress in the orchard north of Ginchy. At the same time, the 2nd Sherwoods got astride of the little railway which intersected their position. The gains were inconsiderable, however, which could not be said for the losses, mostly due to machine-gun fire from the Quadrangle. The fact that this point was still untaken gave the whole Fourteenth Corps a very difficult start for the general action upon September 15 to which we now come.

On the signal for the general advance the Guards Division advanced on the front between Delville Wood and Ginchy. The 1st Guards Brigade was on the left, the 2nd on the right, and the 3rd in reserve. The front line of battalions counting from the left were the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Coldstreams with the 3rd Grenadiers as right flank. Behind, in the second line



from the left, were the 1st Irish, 2nd Grenadiers, 2nd Irish, and 1st Scots. Disregarding the Quadrilateral upon their right, which was holding up the Sixth Division, the Guards swept magnificently onwards, losing many officers and men, but never their direction or formation. From 6.20 in the morning until 4 P.M. they overcame one obstacle after another, and continually advanced, though the progress was unequal at different points on the line. There was a short sharp bout of hand-to-hand fighting in the front line trench, but the rush of the heavy disciplined Guardsmen was irresistible, and the defenders were soon overwhelmed. In this *mêlée* the battalions got badly mixed up, part of the 2nd Irish getting carried away by the 1st Brigade. The 1st Brigade found a more formidable obstacle in front of them in Vat Alley, but this also was cleared after a struggle, the left-hand units getting mixed with the right-hand units of the Fourteenth Division. About one o'clock the 3rd Coldstreams on the extreme left were held up by a wired strong point. They were weak in numbers and almost without officers, so they dug in as best they could and waited. On the right the 2nd Brigade made good progress, and about mid-day its leading line topped the low ridge and saw the land of promise beyond, the green slope leading up to Lesbœufs, and in the middle of the slope, not more than a thousand yards away, a battery of field-guns raining shrapnel upon them. They could get no farther, and they consolidated at this point, digging in under heavy shell-fire. The German infantry was seen at one time marching down in artillery formation for a counter-attack, but the movement was soon dispersed. In the evening the front line, terribly worn and consisting

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of a jumble of exhausted men, held on firmly to the last inch that they had won. Too weak to advance and too proud to retire, they lay under the torment of the shells and waited for dusk. The colonel of the 3rd Coldstreams, in temporary command of his brigade, had sent back during the afternoon for help, and the 2nd Scots were sent up from the 3rd Brigade, but the German barrage was so terrific that they sustained very heavy losses, including Colonel Tempest, Wynne-Finch, the adjutant, and many other officers. The battalion, or what remained of it, arrived in time to help to crush a dangerous counter-attack, which was sweeping down from between Guedecourt and Lesbœufs, a repulse which was entirely inflicted by rifle and Lewis-gun fire. A lieutenant seems to have been the senior officer present at this critical moment, and to have met it as our subalterns have so often met large emergencies during the War. The advanced line was held until upon the next day the 60th Brigade, and finally the whole of the Twentieth Division, took over the new positions, which may be regarded as a protective flank line in continuation of that of the Fifty-sixth Division. It should be mentioned that the 61st Brigade of the Twentieth Division had been lent to the Guards during the battle, and had done very sterling and essential work. For a short time the Guards were rested after this splendid but costly service.

In the meantime the gallant Sixth Division was left face to face with the hardest problem of all, the Quadrilateral trenches, which, as the name would indicate, were as formidable in the flanks or rear as in front. With a tenacity which was worthy of the traditions of this great division it settled down to the

task of clearing its front, meeting with check after check, but carrying on day and night until the thing was done. On the first assault upon September 15, the 1st Leicesters of the 71st Brigade were able to make some progress, but the 8th Bedford of the 16th Brigade, who shared the attack, were completely held up at the starting-point by the terrific fire, while the 1st Buffs had heavy losses in endeavouring to come up to their aid. By about mid-day a mixture of battalions, which numbered about 200 of the York and Lancasters, 50 Buffs and 50 Bedfords, had made their way into the advanced German line, but the Quadrilateral was still intact. The General, seeing the certain losses and uncertain results which must follow from a frontal attack, determined to work round the obstacle, and before evening the 16th Brigade, which had already lost 1200 men, was ready for the advance. The 18th Brigade had gone forward past the Quadrilateral upon the left, working up to the Ginchy-Morval Road, and in close touch with the 1st Scots Guards on the extreme flank of the Guards Division. It now worked down towards the north face of the German stronghold, and in the course of September 16 the 2nd Durham Light Infantry, by a bold advance laid hold of the northern trench of the Quadrilateral down to within a hundred yards of the Ginchy-Morval Road. Here they were relieved by the 1st West Yorks, who took over the task upon the 17th, keeping up constant pressure upon the garrison whose resistance was admirable. These brave men belonged to the One hundred and eighty-fifth German Division. By this time they were isolated, as the British wave had rolled far past them on either side, but their spirit




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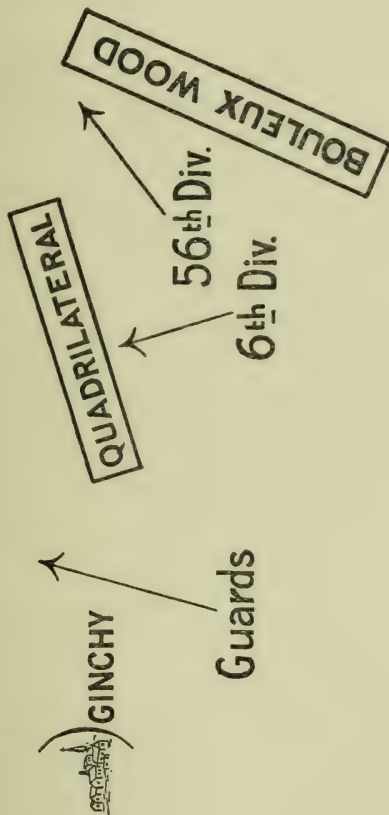
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was as high as ever. A second trench to the north of the work was rushed upon September 17 by the Leicesters, who bayoneted fifty Germans in a hand-to-hand conflict. Early in the morning of September 18 came the end, when the British battalions, led by the 1st Shropshire Light Infantry, closed suddenly in and stormed the position. Seven machine-guns (five of which fell to the Shropshires) and a few hundred exhausted or wounded prisoners represented the trophies of this very difficult operation. The Sixth Division now connected up with the Twentieth upon their left, and with the Fifty-sixth upon their right, after which, upon September 19, they handed over their front for a time to the Fifth Division.

There now only remains the Fifty-sixth Division upon the extreme right of the Army—the division which contained many of the crack London Territorial Battalions, re-formed and reinforced since its terrible losses at the Gommecourt Salient upon July 1. In following the fortunes of this fine division upon September 15, it is necessary to go back for some days, as a series of operations had been undertaken before the great battle, which were as arduous as the battle itself. On coming into the line on September 9, the division had at once been given the task of advancing that wing of the Army. Upon that date the 168th and 169th Brigades were attacking upon the line of the road which connects Ginchy with Combles, the general objects of the advance being gradually to outflank Combles on the one side and the Quadrilateral upon the other. Some ground was permanently gained by both brigades upon that day, the Victoria Rifles and the 4th London doing most of the fighting.

MORVAL ()



ATTACK on QUADRILATERAL, September 15th, 1916.

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Upon September 10 the advance was continued, a scattered clump of trees called Leuze Wood being the immediate obstacle in front of the right-hand brigade, while the left-hand brigade was trying to get into touch with the division upon their left, and were confronted by the continuation of the same system of trenches. The 169th Brigade upon the right was advancing through Leuze Wood, and suffered heavy losses before reaching its objective. On the left the London Scottish and the Rangers were extending east along the Ginchy Road, endeavouring to link up with the Guards, for there was an awkward gap at that date between the divisions. This was filled, however, by the advent of the Fifth and subsequently of the Sixth Division. The object of all the above operations was to get the right flank of the Army into its allotted position for the battle to come.

Upon September 15 the London Division went forward with the whole line at 6.20 in the morning, the 167th Brigade on the left, the 169th upon the right. The original direction of advance had been north and south, but it soon became almost from west to east as the division, pivoting upon Leuze Wood, swung round to attack Bouleaux Wood to the north of it, and to hold a defensive flank for the whole army. Their front was a very narrow one to allow for the fact that their essential work was lateral.

The 167th Brigade fought its way bravely into Bouleaux Wood, where they endured the usual horrors of this forest fighting, which came especially upon the 7th Middlesex battalion, who lost 400 men, chiefly from the fire of unseen machine-guns. There was a very heavy barrage between Ginchy and Bouleaux Wood, so that all reserves and supports endured heavy



losses before they could get up. By mid-day the 1st London and the 8th were involved in the wood and some progress was being made, while the 2nd London of the 169th Brigade had taken and consolidated a trench near the Sunken Road, but a further attack upon a second trench to the east of Leuze Wood, two days later, was a failure. On this same day, September 18, the 168th Brigade relieved the 167th in Bouleaux Wood, while the whole division, like one blade of a scissors, edged its way eastwards towards Combles to meet the French Second Division, who were closing in from the other side. Already rumours were current that the Germans were evacuating this important little town, but many very active German trenches and strong points still lay all round it, through which the Allies, from either side, were endeavouring to force their way. On the night of September 18-19, the 5th Cheshires, pioneer battalion of the division, constructed a long trench parallel to Bouleaux Wood, which formed a defensive flank for the operations. The whole of this wood had now been cleared with the exception of the extreme northern corner. Here we may leave the Fifty-sixth Division, for the fall of Combles will fit in more properly to our next survey, when we shall have once again to go down the whole line from left to right and to show one more stage in the advance.

This Battle of Flers may be said to mark an epoch in military history on account of the use of the so-called tank, an instrument which had no vital effect upon the course of the fight, but which was obviously capable of being much enlarged, and of being made in every way more formidable. It had been a common criticism up to this date that our military equipment

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had always been an imitation, very belated, of that of our enemy. Now at last Great Britain, warming to the War, was giving her inventive and manufacturing as well as her military talents full scope—and the tank was the first-born of her fancy. It is a matter of history that Britain has been the inventor of processes and Germany the adapter of them, so that we had a valuable asset in that direction could we break through our bonds of red tape and get without hindrance from the thinker in his study to the fighter in the trench. Those who have had the experience of discussing any military problem in the Press, and have found by the next post fifty letters from men of all ranks and professions, presenting solutions for it, can best understand how active is the inventive brain of the country. In this instance, Mr. Winston Churchill is said, during his tenure of office, to have first conceived the idea of the tanks, but the actual details were worked out by a number of men. Especially they are owing to Colonel Stern, a civilian before the War, who used his knowledge of motor manufacture and his great organising ability to put the construction through in the shortest time, to Commander d'Eyncourt of the Navy, and to Colonel Swinton, R.E., who looked after the crews and equipment. On an average six of these engines, strange modern resuscitations of the war-chariots of our ancestors, were allotted to each division. The whole affair was frankly experimental, and many got into trouble through the breakdown of machinery, the limits of carrying capacity, and the slipping of the caterpillar driving-bands at the sides. Their pace, too, was against them, as they could only go twenty yards per minute as against the fifty of the infantry. Hence

they had to be sent ahead down lanes in the barrage, with the result that the element of surprise was lessened. Their vision also was very defective, and they were bad neighbours, as they drew fire. The result was a very mixed report from various Divisional Commanders, some of whom swore by, and others at them. The net result, however, was summed up by the words of commendation from General Haig in his despatch, and there were some cases, as at Flers itself, where the work done was simply invaluable, and the machine-guns were nosed out and rooted up before they could do any damage. The adventures of individual tanks could, and no doubt will, fill a volume to themselves, some of them, either in ignorance or recklessness, wandering deep into the enemy's lines, and amazing rearward batteries by their sudden uncouth appearance. Several were destroyed, but none actually fell into the German hands. Enough was done to show their possibilities, and also to prove that the Navy and the Flying Service had not sufficed to exhaust our amazing supply of high-spirited youths ready to undertake the most nerve-shaking tasks so long as a touch of sport gave them a flavour. The very names of these land cruisers, *Crème de Menthe* and the like, showed the joyous, debonair spirit in which their crews faced the unknown dangers of their new calling.

Summing up the events of September 15, it was without any doubt the greatest British victory, though not the most important, which had been gained up to date in the War. July 1 was the most important, and all subsequent ones arose from it, since it was then that the Chinese Wall of Germany was breached. July 14 was also a considerable victory, but it was only a



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portion of the line which was attacked, and that portion was partly regained for a time by the German counter-attacks. The battle of September 15, however, was on as huge a scale as that of July 1, but was devoid of those long stretches of untaken trench which made us pay so heavy a price for our victory. From the Pozières Ridge upon the left to Bouleaux Wood upon the right twelve divisions moved forward to victory, and, save in the small section of the Quadrilateral, everything gave way at once to that majestic advance. The ultimate objectives had been carefully defined, for the Battle of Loos had taught us that the infantry must not outrun the guns, but this pre-ordained limit was attained at almost every spot. Martinpuich, High Wood, Flers, Delville, and Leuze Wood, all passed permanently within the British lines, and the trophies of victory amounted to 5000 prisoners and a dozen guns. At this stage no less than 21,000 prisoners had been taken by the British and 34,000 by the French since the great series of battles was commenced upon July 1.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GAINING OF THE THIEPVAL RIDGE

Assault on Thiepval by Eighteenth Division—Heavy fighting—Co-operation of Eleventh Division—Fall of Thiepval—Fall of Schwaben Redoubt—Taking of Stuff Redoubt—Important gains on the Ridge.

HAVING treated the successful advance made by Rawlinson's Fourth Army upon September 15, it would be well before continuing the narrative of their further efforts to return to Gough's Army upon the north, the right Canadian wing of which had captured Courcellette, but which was occupied in the main with the advance upon the Thiepval Ridge.

The actual capture of Thiepval was an operation of such importance that it must be treated in some detail. The village, or rather the position, was a thorn in the side of the British, as it lay with its veteran garrison of Würtembergers, girdled round and flanked by formidable systems of trenches upon the extreme left of their line. Just above Thiepval was a long slope ending in a marked ridge, which was topped by the Schwaben Redoubt. Both armies recognised the extreme importance of this position, since its capture would mean a fire-command over all the German positions to the north of the Ancre, while

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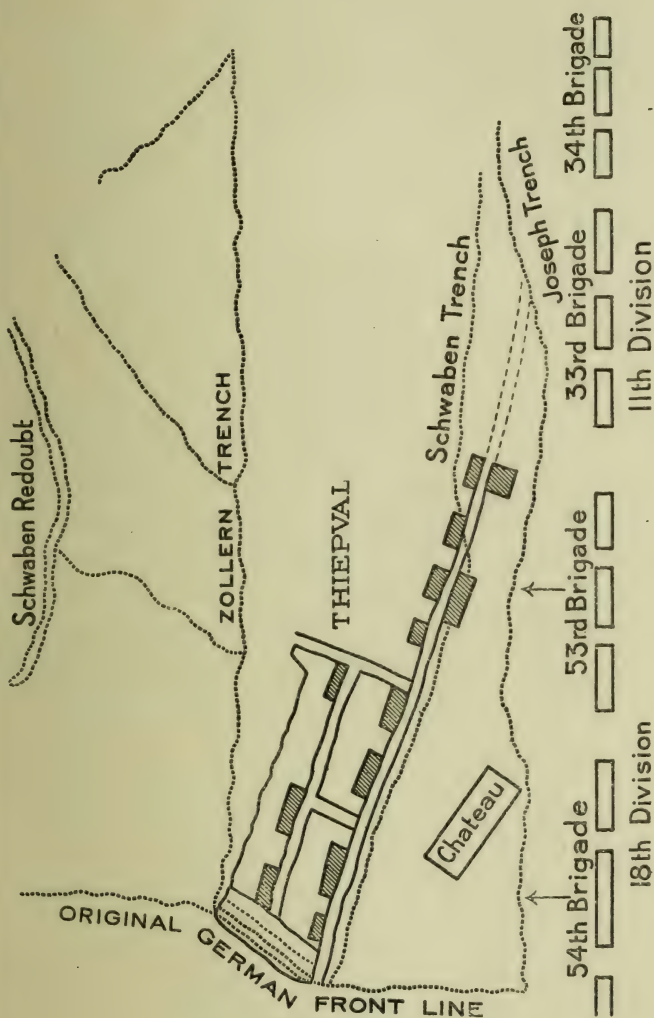
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without it the British could never reap the full result of their success in breaking the line upon July 1. For this reason, instructions had been given to the picked German troops who held it to resist at all costs, even to the death. They had massed at least four hundred guns in order to beat down every assault. Yet the attempt must be made, and it was assigned to Jacob's Second Corps, the actual Divisions engaged being the Eighteenth and the Eleventh, both of them units recruited in the South of England. The latter was distinguished as the first English Division of the New Armies, while the former had already gained great distinction in the early days of the Somme battle when they captured Trones Wood. They were supported in their difficult venture by a considerable concentration of artillery, which included the guns of the Twenty-fifth and Forty-ninth Divisions as well as their own. Jacob, their Corps leader, was an officer who had risen from the command of an Anglo-Indian Brigade to that of a Corps within two years. The whole operation, like all others in this region, was under the direction of Sir Hubert Gough.

Every possible preparation was made for the assault, and all the requirements of prolonged warfare were used to minimise the losses and ensure the success of the storm-troops. Four tanks were brought up to co-operate, and one of them, as will be shown, was of vital use at a critical moment. Instructions were given to the advancing battalions to let their own shrapnel strike within a few yards of their toes as they advanced, huddling in a thick line behind the screen of falling bullets which beat down the machine-guns in front. With fine judgment in some cases the supports were taken out of the advanced trenches and





PLAN illustrating the Capture of THIEPVAL,  
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 (German lines thus .....)

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concealed here or there so that the answering barrage of the enemy fell upon emptiness. So war-wise were the British, and so cool their dispositions, that certain enemy trenches were actually exempted from bombardment, so that they might form an intact nucleus of defence when the place was taken.

The Canadian Corps were to attack from Courcellette upon the right, but their advance was only indirectly concerned with Thiepval Village, being directed towards the ridge which runs north-west of Courcellette to the Schwaben Redoubt. Next to the Canadians on the left was the Eleventh Division, and on their left the Thirteenth, which had been strengthened by the addition of the 146th Brigade of the Forty-ninth Division. The latter brigade held the original British front line during the action so as to release the whole of the Eighteenth Division for the advance. The immediate objective of this division was Thiepval Village, to be followed by the Schwaben Redoubt. Those of the Eleventh Division on its right were Zollern and Stuff Redoubts.

The Eighteenth Division assaulted with two brigades, the 53rd on the right, the 54th on the left, each being confronted by a network of trenches backed by portions of the shattered village. The advance was from south to north, and at right angles to the original British trench line. The hour of fate was 12.35 in the afternoon of September 26.

The average breadth of No Man's Land was 250 yards, which was crossed by these steady troops at a slow, plodding walk, the pace being regulated by the searching barrage, which lingered over every shell-hole in front of them. Through the hard work of the sappers and Sussex pioneers, the assembly

trenches had been pushed well out, otherwise the task would have been more formidable.

Following the fortunes of the 53rd Brigade upon the right, its movements were supposed to synchronise with those of the 33rd Brigade upon the left flank of the Eleventh Division. The right advanced battalion was the 8th Suffolk, with the 10th Essex upon the left, each of them in six waves. Close at their heels came the 8th Norfolk, whose task was to search dug-outs and generally to consolidate the ground won. The front line of stormers rolled over Joseph Trench, which was the German advanced position, but before they had reached it there was a strange eruption of half-dressed unarmed Germans yelling with terror and bolting through the barrage. Many of them dashed through the stolid Suffolks, who took no notice of them, but let them pass. Others lost their nerve like rabbits at a battue, and darted here and there between the lines until the shrapnel found them. It was an omen of victory that such clear signs of shaken *moral* should be evident so early in the day. There was sterner stuff behind, however, as our men were speedily to learn.

The advance went steadily forward, cleaning up the trenches as it went, and crossing Schwaben Trench, Zollern Trench, and Bulgar Trench, in each of which there was sharp resistance, only quelled by the immediate presence of our Lewis guns, or occasionally by the rush of a few determined men with bayonets. It was 2.30 before the advance was brought to a temporary stand by machine-gun fire from the right. After that hour a small party of Suffolks under Lieutenant Mason got forward some distance ahead, and made a strong point which they held till evening,



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this gallant young officer falling under the enemy's fire.

The success of the Suffolks upon the right was equalled by that of the Essex on the left, passing through the eastern portion of Thiepval without great loss, for the usual machine-gun fire seemed to have been stamped out by the British guns. The whole of this fine advance of the 53rd Brigade covered about 1000 yards in depth and accounted for a great number of the enemy in killed, wounded, and prisoners. The advance made and the cost paid both showed that our officers and soldiers were learning the lessons of modern warfare with that swift adaptability which Britain has shown in every phase of this terrific and prolonged test. This old, old nation's blood has flowed into so many younger ones that her own vitality might well be exhausted; but she has, on the contrary, above all the combatants, given evidence of the supple elasticity of youth, moulding herself in an instant to every movement of the grim giant with whom she fought.

Great as had been the success of the 53rd Brigade, it was not possible for them to get on to the Schwaben Redoubt, their ultimate objective, because, as will be shown, matters were more difficult upon the left, and one corner of the village was still in German possession. They ended the day, therefore, with two battalions consolidating the Zollern Line, a third in support in the Schwaben Trench, and a fourth, the 6th Berks, bringing up munitions and food to their exhausted but victorious comrades. The front line was much mixed, but the men were in good heart, and a visit from their Brigadier in the early morning of the 27th did much to reassure them. To carry on the story

of this brigade to the conclusion of the attack it may be added that the whole of the 27th was spent on consolidation and on a daring reconnaissance by a captain of the 53rd Trench Mortar Battery, who crawled forward alone, and made it clear by his report that a new concerted effort was necessary before the Brigade could advance.

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We shall now return to 12.35 P.M. on September 26, and follow the 54th Brigade upon the left. The advance was carried out by the 12th Middlesex, with instructions to attack the village, and by the 11th Royal Fusiliers, whose task was to clear the maze of trenches and dug-outs upon the west of the village, while the 6th Northhamptons were to be in close support. So difficult was the task, that a frontage of only 300 yards was allotted to the Brigade, so as to ensure weight of attack—the Fusiliers having a front line of one platoon.

The advance ran constantly into a network of trenches with nodal strong points which were held with resolution and could only be carried by fierce hand-to-hand fighting. Captain Thompson, Lieutenants Miall-Smith and Cornaby, and many of their Fusiliers in the leading company, were killed or wounded in this desperate business. So stern was the fight that the Fusiliers on the left got far behind their own barrage, and also behind their Middlesex comrades on the right, who swept up as far as the château before they were brought to a temporary halt. Here, at the very vital moment, one of the tanks, the only one still available, came gliding forward and put out of action the machine-guns of the château, breaking down in the effort, and remaining on the scene of its success. Across the whole front of the

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advance there were now a series of small conflicts at close quarters, so stubborn that the left wing of the Fusiliers was held stationary in constant combat for the rest of the day. Extraordinary initiative was shown by privates of both leading battalions when left without officers in this scattered fighting, and here, no doubt, we have a result depending upon the formed educated stuff which went to the making of such troops as these London units of the new armies. Private Edwards and Private Ryder each gained their V.C. at this stage of the action by single-handed advances which carried forward the line. Corporal Tovey lost his life in a similar gallant venture, bayoneting single-handed the crew of a machine-gun and silencing it. Fierce battles raged round garrisoned dug-outs, where no quarter was given or taken on either side. One considerable garrison refused to surrender and perished horribly in the flames of their wood-lined refuge. Those who fled from their refuges were cut down by Lewis guns, a lieutenant of the Fusiliers getting 50 in this manner. This officer also distinguished himself by his use of a captured map, which enabled him to lead his men to the central telephone installation, where 20 operators were seized by a corporal and two files of Fusiliers, who afterwards put the wires out of gear.

These great results had not been obtained without heavy losses. Colonel Carr of the Fusiliers, Major Hudson, and the Adjutant had all fallen. About three in the afternoon the village had all been cleared save the north-west corner, but the battalions were very mixed, the barrage deadly, the order of the attack out of gear, and the position still insecure. The 54th Brigade was well up with the 53rd upon the



right, but upon the left it was held up as already described. The German egg bombs were falling in this area as thick as snowballs in a schoolboy battle, while the more formidable stick bombs were often to be seen, twenty at a time, in the air.

A great deal now depended upon the supports, as the front line was evidently spent and held. The immediate support was the 6th Northhamptons. In moving forward it lost both Colonel Ripley and the Adjutant, and many officers fell, two companies being left entirely to the charge of the sergeants, who rose finely to their responsibilities. When by four o'clock the battalion had got up through the barrage, there were only two unwounded company officers left standing, both second lieutenants. It was one more demonstration of the fact that a modern barrage can create a zone through which it is practically impossible for unarmoured troops to move. The result was that the battalion was so weak by the time it got up, that it was less a support to others than a unit which was in need of support. The three depleted battalions simply held their line, therefore, until night, and under the cover of darkness they were all drawn off, and the remaining battalion, the 7th Bedfords, took their place. That this could be done at night in strange trenches within a few yards of the German line is a feat which soldiers will best appreciate. The result was that as day broke on the 27th the Germans were faced not by a fringe of exhausted men, but by a perfectly fresh battalion which was ready and eager for immediate attack.

The whole of Thiepval had been taken upon the 26th, save only the north-west corner, and it was upon this that two companies of the Bedfords were now

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directed, their objectives being defined for them by a captain who had fought over the ground the day before. Thanks to the gallant leadership of another captain and of Lieutenant Adlam (the latter gaining his Victoria Cross), the place was carried at small loss, and this last refuge of the Thiepval Germans was cleared out. It was a glorious achievement, for by it this very strong point, held against all attacks, French or British, for two years, passed permanently into our hands. The losses were not excessive for such a gain, amounting to about 1500 men. Those of the Germans were very much heavier, and included 600 prisoners drawn from four different regiments. Over 1000 dead were counted.

We will now hark back to 12.35 P.M., the hour of assault, and follow the fortunes of the Eleventh or first English Division of the New Armies which was advancing upon the right of the Eighteenth Division. Within half an hour of the assault the 33rd Brigade and the 34th had crossed both the Joseph and the Schwaben Trenches, the 6th Borders, 9th Sherwood Foresters, 8th Northumberland Fusiliers, and 9th Lancashire Fusiliers forming the front line. Keeping some sort of touch with Maxse's men on the left they pushed on until their right wing was held up by violent machine-gun fire from the Zollern Redoubt and from Mouquet Farm, the losses falling especially upon the 5th Dorsets. Between six and seven in the evening a mixed body of troops from the division, assisted by the machine-guns of two stranded tanks, attacked Mouquet and finally carried it.

The Eighteenth Division had still a very formidable task before it to be undertaken with the co-operation of the Eleventh upon its right. This was the capture

of the formidable stronghold, made up of many trenches and called the Schwaben Redoubt. It was a thousand yards distant up a long broken slope. No time was lost in tackling this new labour, and at 1 P.M. on September 28 the troops moved forward once again, the same brigades being used, but the worn battalions being replaced by fresh units drawn from the 55th Brigade. The 53rd Brigade on the right had the undefeatable Suffolks and the 7th Queen's Surreys in the van with Norfolks and Essex behind. The 54th upon a narrower front had the 7th Bedfords in front, with the 5th West Yorks from the Fortyninth Division in immediate support, the Buffs and East Surrey being in Divisional Reserve. The Germans had got a captive balloon into the air, but their gunnery was not particularly improved thereby.

At the first rush the Suffolk and Queen's on the right took Bulgar and Martin Trenches, while the Eleventh Division took Hessian. By 2.30 Market Trench had also fallen. The troops were now well up to Schwaben, and small groups of men pushed their way home in spite of a furious resistance. The Eleventh Division had won home on the right, and the Suffolks were in touch with them and with the Queen's, so that the position before evening was thoroughly sound. Part of this enormous stronghold was still in German hands, however, and all our efforts could not give us complete control.

Upon the left the 7th Bedfords, leading the 54th Brigade, had made a very notable advance, crossing Market Trench and getting well up to the western face of the great Redoubt. The Reserves, however, lost direction amid the chaos of shell-holes and trenches, drifting away to the left. The Schwaben was occupied

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at several points, and the first-fruits of that commanding position were at once picked, for the light machine-guns were turned upon the German fugitives as they rushed with bent backs down the sloping trenches which led to St. Pierre Divion. The West Yorkshires were well up, and for a time these two battalions and the Germans seem to have equally divided this portion of the trench between them. There was stark fighting everywhere with bomb and bayonet, neither side flinching, and both so mixed up that neither German nor British commanders could tell how the units lay. In such a case a General can only trust to his men, and a British General seldom trusts in vain.

As night fell in this confused scene where along the whole line the Eighteenth Division had reached its objective but had not cleared it, attempts were made to bring up new men, the Berkshires, a battalion of young drafts, relieving the Suffolks on the right. In the morning two local counter-attacks by the Germans succeeded in enlarging their area. At the same time the 55th Brigade took over the front, the four battalions being reunited under their own Brigadier. It was clear that the German line was thickening, for it was a matter of desperate urgency to them to recover the Redoubt. They still held the northern end of the labyrinth. On September 30 the East Surreys, moving up behind a massive barrage, took it by storm, but were driven out again before they could get their roots down. The Germans, encouraged by their success, surged south again, but could make no headway. On October 1 the tide set northwards once more, and the Buffs gained some ground. From then till October 5, when the Eighteenth Division was relieved by the Thirty-ninth, there

were incessant alarms and excursions, having the net result that at the latter date the whole Redoubt with the exception of one small section, afterwards taken by the Thirty-ninth, was in our hands. So ended for the moment the splendid service of the Eighteenth Division. Nearly 2000 officers and men had fallen in the Schwaben operations, apart from the 1500 paid for Thiepval. It is certain, however, that the Schwaben garrison had suffered as much, and they left 232 prisoners in the hands of the victors.

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For the purpose of continuity of narrative, we have kept our attention fixed upon the Eighteenth Division, but the Eleventh Division, which we have left at Mouquet Farm some pages before, had been doing equally good work upon the right. In the afternoon of September 27 the 6th Borders, rushing suddenly from Zollern Trench, made a lodgment in Hessian Trench, to which they resolutely clung. On their left the 6th Yorks and 9th West Yorks had also advanced and gained permanent ground, winning their way into the southern edge of Stuff Redoubt. Here they had to face a desperate counter-attack, but Captain White, with a mixed party of the battalions named, held on against all odds, winning his V.C. by his extraordinary exertions. During the whole of September 29 the pressure at this point was extreme, but the divisional artillery showed itself to be extremely efficient, and covered the exhausted infantry with a most comforting barrage.

The 32nd Brigade was now brought up, and on September 30 the advance was resumed, the whole of this brigade and the 6th Lincolns and 7th South Staffords of the 33rd being strongly engaged. The results were admirable, as the whole of Hessian Trench

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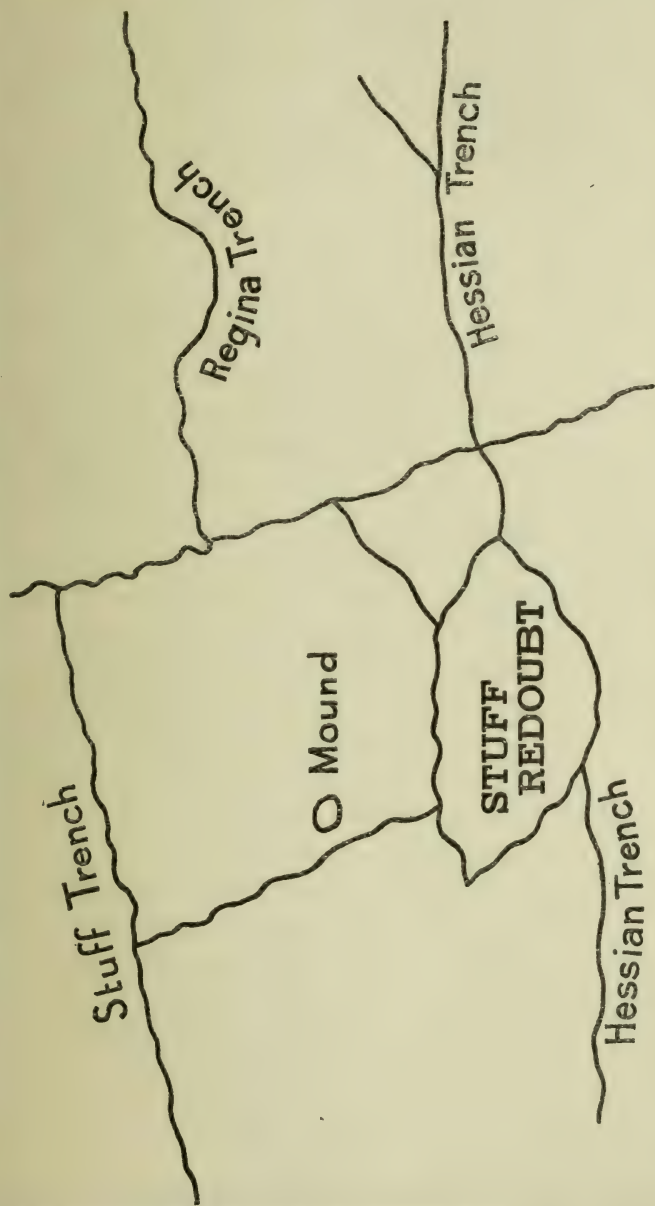
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and the south of Stuff Redoubt were occupied. That night the Eleventh Division was relieved by the Twenty-fifth, and it will now be told how the conquest of the Ridge was finally achieved. The Eleventh withdrew after having done splendid work and sustained losses of 144 officers and 3500 men. Their prisoners amounted to 30 officers and 1125 of all ranks, with a great number of machine-guns and trench mortars.

After the fall of Thiepval and the operations which immediately followed it the front British line in this quarter ran approximately east and west along the Thiepval-Courcelette ridge. As far as part of the front was concerned we had observation over the Valley of the Ancre, but in another part the Germans still held on to the Stuff Redoubt, and thence for a stretch they were still on the crest and had the observation. The Stuff Redoubt itself on the southern face had been occupied by the Eleventh, when the Schwaben Redoubt was taken by the Eighteenth Division, but the northern faces of both were still in the hands of the enemy. These had now to be taken in order to clear up the line. A further stronghold, called The Mounds, immediately to the north, came also within the operation.

The Twenty-fifth Division had, as stated, relieved the Eleventh, and this new task was handed over to it. Upon October 9 the first attack was made by the 10th Cheshires, and although their full objective was not reached, the result was satisfactory, a lodgment being made and 100 of the garrison captured, with slight casualties to the stormers, thanks to the good barrage and the workmanlike way in which they took advantage of it. A strong attempt





**STUFF REDOUBT SYSTEM** showing Hessian, Regina and Stuff.

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on the part of the Germans to prevent consolidation and to throw out the intruders was quite unsuccessful.

The 8th North Lancs were now placed in the position of the Cheshires, while the Thirty-ninth Division upon the left joined in the pressure. Upon October 10 an attack was made by the 16th Sherwoods supported by the 17th Rifles of the 117th Brigade; but it had no success. On the 12th there was a renewed attack by units of the 118th Brigade, chiefly the 4th Black Watch. This succeeded in advancing the line for a short distance, and upon October 15 it repulsed two local counter-attacks. Upon the right the 8th North Lancs upon October 14 had a very successful advance, in which they carried with moderate loss the stretch of line opposite, as well as the position called The Mounds. Two machine-guns and 125 prisoners were taken.

The British now had observation along the whole ridge with a line of observation posts pushed out beyond the crest. There were formidable obstacles upon their right front, however, where the Regina Trench and a heavily fortified quadrilateral system lay in front of the troops already mentioned, and also of the Canadians on the Courcellette line. In order to get ready for the next advance there was some side-stepping of units, the hard-worked Eighteenth coming in on the right next the Canadians, the Twenty-fifth moving along, and the Thirty-ninth coming closer on the left. On October 8 the Canadians had a sharp action, in which the Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Winnipeg Battalions showed their usual resolution, and took a couple of hundred prisoners, but were unable to gain much ground. A concerted movement of the whole line was now organised.

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The great Stuff Trench, which was roughly a continuation of the Regina, was opposite the centre of the attack, and was distant some 300 yards from the British front. The barrage arrangements coordinated by the Second Corps (Jacob), to which these units now belonged, worked most admirably. The attack was made all along the line and was eminently successful. At 12.35 upon October 21 the general advance began, and at 4.30 the whole objective, including Stuff and Regina, was in the hands of the British and Canadians. It was a fine victory, with 20 machine-guns and 1000 prisoners of the 5th Ersatz and Twenty-eighth Bavarian Divisions as trophies. So rapid was the consolidation that before morning trenches were opened out between the captured line and the old British position. A curious incident in this most successful attack was that the 8th Border Regiment advanced at least a thousand yards beyond its objective, but was successful in getting back. By this brilliant little action the enemy was finally driven down upon a three-mile front north of Thiepval and Courcelette, until he had no foothold left save the marshes to the south of the Ancre, where he cowered in enfiladed trenches for that final clearing up which was only delayed by the weather. It should be added that on this same date, October 21, the left of the British line, formed by the Thirty-ninth Division, was attacked by storm-troops of the German Twenty-eighth Reserve Division, armed with *flammenwerfer* and supported by 60 light batteries. The attack was formidable, and twice got into the British line, but was twice driven out again, leaving many prisoners and trophies behind. The Sussex and Hampshire troops of the 116th Brigade, aided by the 17th Rifles,

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stood splendidly to their work, and ended by holding every inch of their ground, and adding a new German trench which was carried by the 14th Hants.

From this time onwards this northern section of the line was quiet save for small readjustments, until the great effort upon November 13, which brought the autumn campaign to a close with the considerable victory of Beaumont Hamel. From the point which the Second Corps had now reached it could command with its guns the Valley of the Ancre to the north of it, including some of those positions which had repulsed our attack upon July 1 and were still in German hands. So completely did we now outflank them from the south that it must have been evident to any student of the map that Haig was sure, sooner or later, to make a strong infantry advance over the ground which was so completely controlled by his artillery. It was the German appreciation of this fact which had caused their desperate efforts at successive lines of defence to hold us back from gaining complete command of the crest of the slope. It will be told in the final chapter of this volume how this command was utilised, and a bold step was taken towards rolling up the German positions from the south—a step which was so successful that it was in all probability the immediate cause of that general retirement of the whole German front which was the first great event in the campaign of 1917.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

From September 15 to the Battle of the Ancre

Capture of Eaucourt—Varying character of German resistance—Hard trench fighting along the line—Dreadful climatic conditions—The meteorological trenches—Hazy Trench—Zenith Trench—General observations—General von Arnim's report.

HAVING described the Battle of Flers, which began upon September 15 and which extended over one, two, or three days according to the completeness of the local victory, or the difficulty of reaching any definite limit, we will now turn once more to the left of the line (always excepting Gough's flanking army, which has been treated elsewhere), and we shall follow the deeds of the successive divisions in each sector up to the end of the operations. We will begin with the Third Corps, who abutted upon the Canadians in the Martinpuich sector, and covered the line up to Drop Alley, north-east of High Wood, where they joined up with the Fifteenth Corps.

The line on this western section was less active than on the right, where the great villages of Combles, Lesbœufs, and Morval were obvious marks for the advance. After the battle of September 15, the

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Twenty-third Division, relieving the Fifteenth, took its station at the extreme left of the line, just north of Martinpuich. To the right of the Twenty-third, occupying the Starfish and Prue system of trenches, was the Fiftieth Division. On their right was the First, who had relieved the Forty-seventh Division, the victors of High Wood. These three divisions, Twenty-third, Fiftieth, and First, now formed the Third Corps. Their fighting patrols were thrown well out during the days after the battle, and their front posts were as far north as Crescent Alley and Hook Trench. The general attack of September 25, which amounted to a considerable battle, did not seriously affect this portion of the line. The only operation of note before the end of the month was an attack upon a farm in the front of their line by the 70th Brigade of the Twenty-third Division—a brigade which had greatly distinguished itself during the time it had fought with the Eighth Division upon July 1. This attack failed the first time, but it was repeated with success at dawn upon September 29, and the line moved forward to that limited extent. Another small advance was made by the First Division on the night of September 25, east of Eaucourt, when a piece of trench was carried by the gallantry of a platoon of the 2nd Rifles, consisting almost entirely of Rhodesian volunteers, samples of those wandering Britons who have played a part in this War which can never be chronicled. The way in which the distant sons, prodigal or otherwise, came back to the help of their hard-pressed mother is one of the most beautiful chapters in the history of the Empire.

The Flers front-line trench bends away from the British position as it trends towards the north-west,



so that although it had been made good over a large portion in the Battle of Flers, it was still intact opposite the Third Corps. Upon October 1, however, it was attacked, and was taken without any great difficulty, though the Fiftieth in the centre had to fight hard for their section. The storming battalions, after re-forming, continued their advance, and occupied the line between Le Sars and Flers. The village of Eaucourt lay in their path, and was well guarded upon the west by uncut wire, but a tank rolled its majestic path across it and the shouting infantry crowded close behind. The 141st Brigade of the Forty-seventh Division, which had come back once again into the line, was the first to enter this village, which was the sixteenth torn by the British from the grip of the invaders since the breaking of the line, while the French captures stood at an even higher figure. There was a strong counter-attack upon Eaucourt during the night, accompanied by a shortage of bombs owing to the fact that the store had been destroyed by an unlucky shell. The Germans for the time regained the village, and the ruins were partly occupied by both armies until October 3, when the British line, once more gathering volume and momentum, rolled over it for the last time. It had been stoutly defended by men of a German reserve division, and its capture had cost us dear. One of the mysteries of the fighting at this stage was the very varied quality of the resistance, so that the advancing British were never sure whether they would find themselves faced by demoralised poltroons, capable of throwing up their hands by the hundred, or by splendid infantry, who would fight to the death with the courage of despair.

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Having won Eaucourt, the next village which faced the British line in this sector was Le Sars, immediately to the north-west. The advance upon this was carried out amid rain and slush which made military operations almost impossible. It was again found that the resistance was very spirited, but the place was none the less carried and consolidated upon October 7.

In the week preceding the final assault there was hard fighting, during which the 70th Brigade won its way forward into a favourable position for the attack. The 8th York and Lancasters particularly distinguished themselves by their gallantry in clearing by bombing the outlying German defences, Major Sawyer and Lieutenant de Burgh of that battalion winning the Cross for their fine leadership upon that occasion. The decisive attack was carried out by the other two brigades of the Twenty-third Division, which advanced upon the village, whilst the Forty-seventh Division made an attempt upon the formidable Butte of Warlencourt. The latter venture met with no success, but the former was brilliantly carried out. The advance was made by the 68th Brigade upon the right and the 69th upon the left, the Martinpuich-Warlencourt Road being the dividing line between the two divisions. The attack was at 1.45 P.M., and in broad daylight the battalions concerned, notably the 12th and 13th Durhams and the 9th Yorks, clambered over their sodden sandbags and waded through the mud which separated them from the Germans. The numbers were so reduced that the companies formed only two weak platoons, but none the less they advanced very steadily. Captain Blake, leading the first company of Durhams, was shot dead ;

but another captain took over both companies and led them straight at the village, both the 12th Durhams and 9th Yorks reaching the sunken road in front of the houses at about the same moment. They worked their way down this and bombed many Germans in their dug-outs. Here, as elsewhere, experience proved that this system of taking refuge from shell-fire in deep burrows has very serious military disadvantages, not merely on account of the difficulty of getting out, but from the more serious objection that the men, being trained to avoid danger, continued to shrink from it when it was essential that they should rush out and face it. The yellow faces and flaccid appearance of our prisoners showed also the physical results of a troglodytic life.

A single tank which had accompanied the advance was set on fire by a shell, but the infantry pressed on undismayed, and well backed up by the 10th and 11th Northumberland Fusiliers and 8th Seaforths, they soon seized the whole village and firmly consolidated their position. The success was partly due to the fine handling of machine-guns, which turned the favourite weapon of the Germans against themselves. Five of these guns, 8 officers, and 450 men were taken during the operation.

The Forty-seventh Division, meanwhile, in attempting to make similar progress upon the right was held up by very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. Immediately afterwards, this division, much worn by its splendid service, was taken out of the line, being replaced by the Ninth Scottish Division. Their companion Division, the Fifteenth, had come back upon their left. The weather now became so abominable and the mud so abysmal, that all prospect



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of farther progress in this section had to be abandoned. The old prehistoric mark called the Butte of Warlencourt, which had long stood up as a goal in front of the British trenches, proved really to be the final mark of their advance until a new season should dawn. Upon October 12 there was an attempt to get forward, but the conditions were impossible, and the results unsatisfactory. In this affair the gallant Ninth Division had considerable losses, their advance being conducted with the 26th Brigade upon the right and the South Africans upon the left. Some small gain was achieved by the former, but the latter were held up by a deadly machine-gun fire. The Thirtieth Division was upon the right of the Ninth at this period, and twice endeavoured to get forwards—once upon the 12th and once upon the 18th; but neither of these attempts had good success, partly owing to the very bad weather, and partly to the excellent resistance of the Sixth Bavarian Reserve Division, which is described by those who have fought against it as one of the very best divisions in the German army. On the 20th a fresh attack was made by the 27th Brigade with no success and heavy losses to the 6th Scottish Borderers. Early in November a renewed attempt was made by the Fiftieth Division to advance in this quarter, but the country was a morass and no progress was possible. The Canadians, Forty-eighth and Fiftieth Divisions, who held the Le Sars front, were condemned to inactivity. From that time onwards the line of the Third Corps was undisturbed, save for a strong counter-attack upon November 6, which neutralised a small advance made upon the 5th. Le Sars and Eaucourt were consolidated and continued to be the British advanced posts in this quarter. The

conditions of mud and discomfort can only be described as appalling.

Having briefly traced the work of the Third Corps from the action of September 15 to the coming of the winter, we shall now turn to the Fifteenth Corps upon the right and follow their operations from the same date. It will be remembered that the New Zealanders formed the left-hand division, and that they had advanced so finely that by the evening of September 16 they were up to, but not in, Goose Alley and Factory Corner, from which they were within striking distance of the Gird System.

Before attacking this, however, it was necessary to get a firmer hold of Flers Trench, which in its western reaches was still in the hands of the Germans. It was a desperate business of bombing from traverse to traverse and overcoming successive barricades upon a very narrow front where a few determined men could hold up a company. This difficult business was taken in hand at 8.30 on the night of September 21 by the 2nd Canterbury Battalion, who advanced down the trench. It was a Homeric conflict, which lasted for the whole night, where men stood up to each other at close quarters, clearing away the dead and dying in order to make room for fresh combatants in the front line. Down Flers Trench and Drop Alley raged the long struggle, with crash and flare of bombs, snarl of machine-guns, shrill whistles from rallying officers, and shouts from the furious men. The New Zealand Black Watch had gained a portion of the trench, but the German reinforcements streamed down a communication trench which opened behind them, and found themselves between the two bodies of New Zealanders. It was a great fight, but by morning

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it had been definitely decided in favour of the men from oversea. The long section of Flers Trench was cleared and part of Goose Alley, opening out of it, was held. No less than 350 German dead were picked up, and a handful of prisoners were left with the victors. The New Zealand losses were about 150 of all ranks.

On September 25 the New Zealanders tightened their grip upon Goose Alley, which connects up the Flers and the Gird Systems of trenches. In the meantime the divisions upon their right were moving to the north-east of Flers towards the village of Guede-court, which lay upon the farther side of the Gird Trenches. The actual attack upon the village was committed to the Twenty-first Division, who advanced on a two-brigade front, the 110th Leicester Brigade making straight for the village itself, while the 64th Brigade upon its right, strengthened by the inclusion of the 1st Lincolns, was ordered to occupy 1000 yards of front to the right. The two brigades were not equally fortunate. The Leicester brigade, by a fine advance, pierced the Gird Trench, and made their way beyond it. The 64th Brigade was held up by uncut wire, which they could not penetrate. The result was that the Leicesters, being heavily counter-attacked, and having their flanks open, were forced back as far as the Gird Trench, to which they clung. The position in the evening was a curious one, for we held the Gird Trench at two different points, but between them lay a stretch of 1000 yards still occupied by the Germans and faced with uncut wire. Orders reached the Divisional General during the night that at all costs the position must be carried. By a happy inspiration he sent for a tank from Flers,



and ordered the Leicesters to bomb down Gird Trench in co-operation with the tank, which crawled along the parapet. A strong point had been erected at the far end of the trench, and the Germans as they rushed away from the danger ran into a deadly machine-gun fire. The upshot was that a great number were killed, while 8 officers and 362 men were taken, with a loss to the attackers of 5 wounded. To add to the quaintness of the operation, an aeroplane flew low over the trench during its progress, helping with its bombs to make the victory complete. The result was far more than the capture of the trench, for the 64th Brigade, led by the Durhams, at once swept forward and captured their objective, while the 110th Brigade upon the left reached Guedecourt under happier auspices and remained in possession of the village.

Although the Gird line had been pierced at this point, it was held in its western length, and this was attacked upon September 27 by the New Zealanders and the Fifty-fifth Lancashire Territorial Division, both of which gained their objectives, so that the whole end of this great trench system from a point north of Flers passed definitely into the British possession.

On October 1 there was a fresh general advance which led to no great change in this part of the line, save that both the New Zealanders and the Twenty-first Division improved their position, the latter getting as far as Bayonet Trench. Shortly afterwards the New Zealanders were drawn out, having been 23 consecutive days in the line, and earned themselves a great reputation. "The division has won universal confidence and admiration," said Sir Douglas Haig. "No praise can be too high for such troops."

We now turn to the Fourteenth Corps, which filled

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the remainder of the British line up to the point of its junction with the French. During the battle the division of Guards had, as will be remembered, held the left of this line, but on the day after it was replaced for a short time by the Twentieth Division, whose 61st Brigade, especially the 7th Cornwalls and 12th King's, were heavily engaged. The 60th Brigade had pushed up into the fighting line, and received a strong German counter-attack in the morning of the 17th, which broke down before the rifles of the 6th Shropshire Light Infantry. In the afternoon the 59th Brigade advanced upon the left and the 60th upon the right, closing in upon the Morval position. The 12th King's Royal Rifles of the latter brigade was held up by a strong point and lost heavily, but the general effect was to bring the British line nearer to the doomed village. Twice upon the 18th, German counter-attacks swarmed down upon the exposed right flank of the 60th Brigade, but each time they were blown back by the fire of the 12th Rifle Brigade and the 12th Rifles. The 59th Brigade had made no progress, the two Rifle Brigade battalions (10th and 11th) having particularly heavy losses upon the 17th, but they were holding their line strongly. It was impossible to do more for the moment, for the Sixth Division upon their right was still hung up, as already described, by the Quadrilateral. Shortly after that obstacle had been overcome, the Guards took over once more from the Twentieth, and were ready in conjunction with the Sixth and Fifth Divisions for a serious advance upon Morval and Lesbœufs.

On September 22 the 3rd Guards Brigade was in touch with the Twenty-first Division upon the left, which was now holding Gird Trench and Gird Support

as far north as Watling Street. On this day the 4th Grenadiers, reverting after centuries to the weapon which their name implies, were bombing their way up Gas Alley, which leads towards Lesbœufs. On the 23rd the Twenty-first on the left, the Guards in the centre, and the Sixth Division were advancing and steadily gaining ground to the north-east, capturing Needle Trench, which is an off-shoot from the Gird System. On the 24th the Germans counter-attacked upon the 16th Brigade, the blow falling upon the 1st Buffs, who lost four bays of their trench for a short period, but speedily drove the intruders out once more. The 14th Durham Light Infantry also drove off an attack. The Fifth Division was now coming up on the right of the Sixth, and played a considerable part in the decisive attack upon September 25.

On this date an advance of the four divisions on this section of the line carried all before it, the Twenty-first being north of Delville Wood, the 3rd Brigade of the Guards operating on the German trenches between Guedecourt and Lesbœufs, the 1st Brigade of Guards upon the left of the village of Lesbœufs, the Sixth Division upon the right of Lesbœufs, and the Fifth Division on Morval.

In this attack the 4th Grenadiers upon the extreme left of the Guards were badly punished, for the Twenty-first upon their left had been held up, but the rest came along well, the 1st Welsh forming a defensive flank upon the left while the other battalions reached their full objective and dug in, unmolested save by our own barrage. The 1st Irish and 3rd Coldstream, who were on the left of the 1st Brigade, also got through without heavy loss and occupied the trenches to the immediate north and north-east of Lesbœufs.



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The 2nd Grenadiers, who led the right of the Brigade, with their supporting battalion the 2nd Coldstream, headed straight for the village, and were held up for a time by uncut wire, but the general attack upon the right was progressing at a rate which soon took the pressure off them.

The British infantry were swarming round Lesbœufs in the early afternoon, and about 3.15 the 1st West Yorks of the 18th Brigade penetrated into it, establishing touch with the Guards upon their left. They were closely followed by their old battle companions, the 2nd Durham Light Infantry. The German resistance was weaker than usual, and the casualties were not severe. On the Morval front the 15th Brigade of the Fifth Division, with the 95th Brigade upon their right, were making a steady and irresistible advance upon Morval. The 1st Norfolks and 1st Cheshires were in the front, and the latter battalion was the first to break into the village with the 1st Bedfords, 2nd Scots Borderers, and 16th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in close support. The 1st Cheshires particularly distinguished itself; and it was in this action that Private Jones performed his almost incredible feat of capturing single-handed and bringing in four officers and 102 men of the 146th Würtemberg Regiment, including four wearers of the famous Iron Cross. The details of this extraordinary affair, where one determined and heavily-armed man terrorised a large company taken at a disadvantage, read more like the romantic exploit of some Western desperado who cries "Hands up!" to a drove of tourists, than any operation of war. Jones was awarded the V.C., and it can have been seldom won in such sensational fashion.

Whilst the 15th Brigade of the Fifth Division attacked the village of Morval the 95th Brigade of the same division carried the German trenches to the west of it. This dashing piece of work was accomplished by the 1st Devons and the 1st East Surreys. When they had reached their objective, the 12th Gloucesters were sent through them to occupy and consolidate the south side of the village. This they carried out with a loss of 80 men. In the evening a company of the 6th Argylls, together with the 2nd Home Company Royal Engineers, pushed on past the village and made a strong point against the expected counter-attack; while the 15th Brigade extended and got into touch with the 2nd York and Lancasters of the Sixth Division upon their left. It was a great day of complete victory with no regrets to cloud it, for the prisoners were many, the casualties were comparatively few, and two more village sites were included by one forward spring within the British area. The Town Major of Morval stood by his charge to the last and formed one of the trophies. On the 26th the Germans came back upon the Guards at about one o'clock, but their effort was a fiasco, for the advancing lines came under the concentrated fire of six batteries of the 7th Divisional Artillery. Seldom have Germans stampeded more thoroughly. "Hundreds of the enemy can be seen retiring in disorder over the whole front. They are rushing towards Beaulencourt in the wildest disorder." Such was the report from a forward observer. At the same time a tank cleared the obstacles in front of the Twenty-first Division and the whole line was straight again. The British consolidated their positions firmly, for it was already evident

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that they were likely to be permanent ones. The Guards and Fifth Division were taken out of the line shortly afterwards, the Twentieth Division coming in once more upon September 26, while upon September 27 the French took over part of the line, pushing the Twentieth Division to the left, where they took over the ground formerly held by the Twenty-first. Upon October 1 the 61st Brigade was ordered to push forward advanced posts and occupy a line preparatory to future operations. This was well carried out and proved of great importance when a week later attacks were made upon Cloudy and Rainbow Trenches.

Leaving this victorious section of the line for the moment, we must turn our attention to the hard-worked and splendid Fifty-sixth Division upon their right, whose operations were really more connected with those of the French on their right than with their comrades of the Fourteenth Corps upon the left. By a happy chance it was the French division of the same number with which they were associated during much of the time. It will be remembered that at the close of the Flers action (September 15 and on), the Fifty-sixth Division was holding a defensive flank to the south, in the region of Bouleaux Wood, part of which was still held by the Germans. They were also closing in to the southwards, so as to co-operate with the French, who were approaching Combles from the other side. On September 25, while the Fifth were advancing upon Morval, the Fifty-sixth played an important part, for the 168th, their left brigade, carried the remainder of Bouleaux Wood, and so screened the flank of the Fifth Division. One hundred men and four machine-guns were captured in this movement. On the 26th, as the woods



were at last clear, the division turned all its attention to Combles, and at 3.15 in the afternoon of that day fighting patrols of the 169th Brigade met patrols of the French in the central square of the town. The Germans had cleverly evacuated it, and the booty was far less than had been hoped for, but none the less its capture was of great importance, for it was the largest place that had yet been wrenched out of the iron grasp of Germany. After the fall of Combles the French, as already stated, threw out their left wing upon that side so as to take over the ground which had been covered by the Fifty-sixth Division, and afterwards by the Fifth Division.

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On September 30 the Fifty-sixth Division took over from the Guards, and again found itself upon the right of the British line, and in touch with the new dispositions of the French. On its left was the Twentieth Division, and on their left the Sixth. These three divisions now found themselves opposite to a long line of trenches, to which various meteorological names had been given, though the actual meteorological conditions at the time formed a greater obstacle than the defences in front of them. A simple diagram (p. 296) will show more clearly than any words how these formidable trenches lay with regard to the British advance.

It may well seem to the reader that the defenders are bound to have the best of the argument when they can thus exchange one line for another, and as quickly as they are beaten out of one set of strongholds confront their enemy with another one. No doubt so long as the lines are stoutly held this is true as regards the rate of advance. But as far as it concerns the losses which mark that vital attrition which was

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wearing Germany to the bone it was very different. These trenches were not like the old permanent fortifications where German officers in a 30-foot dug-out could smile over the caricatures in *Ulk* and smoke an indolent cigarette, while the impotent British shells pitted the earth-surface far above them. There was no such shelter in these hastily-constructed burrows, while the guns which raked and pounded them grew stronger and more numerous from day to day. Let the machine-gun do its worst, the heavy gun is still the master of the field, for the machine-gun can only levy its toll when circumstances favour it, while day or night the heavy gun is a constant dread. We have had to mourn the swathes of our dead in the open, but the Germans lay as thick amid the clay and chalk of the Picardy ditches. With fine manhood they clung to them and beat back our infantry where they could, but the tales of deserters, the letters found on the wounded, and the condition of the trenches when taken, all told the same story of terrible loss.

On October 7 there was an infantry attack upon this trench system in which the Forty-first, Twelfth, Twentieth, and Fifty-sixth Divisions, together with the French, all took part in the order named from the left. The weather was most execrable, and its vileness told entirely against the Allies, since it was they who had to move, and since the superior gun-power needed for a modern attack was largely neutralised by the difficulty in using aircraft observation. The attack was at 1.45 P.M., when the troops advanced under a heavy barrage along the whole sodden and slippery front. The results were unequal, though the infantry behaved everywhere with their wonted valour and perseverance.



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The 122nd Brigade upon the extreme left of the attack could only get on about a hundred yards, so heavy was the fire; while the 124th to the right of them could do little better, and eventually dug in at a point 200 yards short of the Bayonet Trench, which was their immediate objective. Seventy officers and nearly 1300 men fell during this attack of the Forty-first Division, which was handicapped in many ways, for the men were weary, it was too cloudy for reconnaissance, the battalions were already depleted, and the enemy was fresh and unshaken. The success of the Twelfth Division upon the right of the Forty-first was little better. The 36th and 37th Brigades endured heavy losses, especially in the case of the two Royal Fusilier battalions and of the 6th Buffs, whose colonel greatly distinguished himself. In spite of every effort and considerable loss there were no permanent gains of importance at this point.

Things went better, however, with the Twentieth Division upon the right. The two brigades in the front line were the 61st upon the left and the 60th on the right. The leading battalions, counting from the left, were the 7th Yorks Light Infantry, 12th King's Liverpool, 6th Oxford and Bucks, and 12th Rifle Brigade. The troops had to endure a considerable shelling before leaving their trenches, but it seemed only to add additional fire to their advance, which swept over the low ridge in front of them, and took a long stretch of Rainbow Trench. The right attack was slower than the left, as it ran into a dip of the ground in which the Germans had some cleverly-sited wire entanglement, unseen and untouched by our guns. Nothing daunted, the Oxford

and Bucks proceeded to cut lanes through the wire under heavy fire, and one officer of the battalion had actually succeeded in crawling under it when he was shot at point-blank range from the German trench. The front line had now done its work and rested in Rainbow, while the second line—consisting, from the left, of the 7th Somersets, 7th Cornwalls, 6th Shropshires, and 12th Rifles—swept onwards in splendid form, capturing both Cloudy and Misty Trenches. There the victorious infantry dug themselves in on the forward slope of the ridge. The brigades were ahead of their comrades, with the result that their flanks were exposed, they suffered from enfilade fire, and it was necessary to form defensive flanks. Two counter-attacks were made during the day, but both were beaten off. The prisoners captured in this fine advance were 5 officers and 187 men, with 5 machine-guns and 2 trench-mortars. By the morning of the 8th strong points had been made and the whole line was defiant of recapture.

The Fifty-sixth Division had advanced with equal valour upon the right and had made good progress, though its gains had not been so substantial as those of the Twentieth. The 167th Brigade had attacked upon the left and the 168th upon the right. They ended with the 7th Middlesex, their flank battalion upon the left in touch with the Twentieth Division in Rainbow, while the London Scots on the extreme right were in touch with the French in Hazy Trench. The fighting was bitter, however, the men wearied, and the conditions abominable. All the battalions lost heavily, the 4th London being the chief sufferer, for it was on the left flank of the 168th Brigade and was held up by a particularly murderous

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machine-gun. In the evening a strong German counter-attack, rushing in upon Hazy Trench behind a thick shower of bombs, drove back both the 168th Brigade and the French to their own original line. For the time the advance had failed upon the right.

The 167th Brigade had held on to Rainbow and were now bombing their way down Spectrum. They held their ground there during the night, and on October 8 were still advancing, though the 3rd London coming up to reinforce ran into a heavy barrage and were sadly cut up. The British barrage was found to be practically useless because the guns had been brought up too near. The 169th Brigade had come up on the right and was hotly engaged, the London Rifle Brigade getting up close to Hazy and digging in parallel to it, with their left in touch with the Victorias. The Germans, however, were still holding Hazy, nor could it be said in the evening that the British were holding either of the more advanced trenches, Dewdrop or Rainy. In the evening the London Rifle Brigade were forced to leave their new trench because it was enfiladed from Hazy, and to make their way back to their old departure trenches as best they could, dragging with them a captured machine-gun as a souvenir of a long and bloody day's work. On October 9 the British held none of the points in dispute in this section on the right, save only a portion of Spectrum. There was a pause in this long and desperate fight which was conducted by tired infantry fighting in front of tired guns, and which left the survivors of both sides plastered with mud from head to heel. When it was resumed, the two British divisions, the Twentieth and Fifty-sixth, which had



done such long service in the line, and were greatly reduced, had been withdrawn. The Fourth Division had taken the place of the Londoners, while the Sixth, itself very worn, had relieved the Twentieth.

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On October 12 both these divisions delivered an attack together with the French and with the Fifteenth Corps upon their left. The 14th Durham Light Infantry were in Rainbow on the left and were in touch with the 1st West Yorks of the 18th Brigade upon their right, but could find no one upon their left, while the German pressure was very strong. The 18th Brigade worked along Rainbow, therefore, until it got into touch with the Twelfth Division upon their left. The Twelfth Division had been lent the 88th Brigade of the Twenty-ninth Division, and this gallant body, so terribly cut up on July 1, had an instalment of revenge. They won their objective, and it is pleasant to add that the Newfoundlanders especially distinguished themselves. The 16th Brigade upon the right attacked Zenith Trench, the 2nd York and Lancaster leading the rush. The position could not be held, however, by battalions which were depleted by weeks of constant strain and loss. A report from a company officer says: "The few unwounded sheltered in trench holes and returned in the dusk. The fire was too strong to allow them to dig in. The Brigade line is therefore the same as before the attack."

Whilst the Sixth Division had been making this difficult and fruitless attack the Fourth Division upon their right had been equally heavily engaged in this horrible maze of mud-sodden trenches, without obtaining any more favourable result. The 12th Brigade fought on the immediate right of the 16th, some of

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them reaching Spectrum, and some of them Zenith. The 2nd West Ridings and 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers were the heaviest sufferers, the latter holding a line of shell-holes in front of Spectrum where they were exposed to a terrible barrage. The 10th Brigade were on their right, and one battalion, the 1st Warwick, reached Foggy, but was unable to hold it under the crushing fire. By the evening of October 13, however, the whole of Spectrum had at last been seized, and the enemy, who attempted to bomb along it from Dewdrop, were repulsed. On October 18, the 88th Brigade again had a success, the 2nd Hants and 4th Worcesters doing particularly well. For a time the fighting died down, the British licking their wounds and sharpening their claws for a fresh grapple with these redoubtable trenches.

This came upon October 23, when there was an advance at 2.45 in the afternoon by the Fourth Division upon the right and the Eighth Division upon the left. The three-brigade front covered by the Eighth Division is indicated by the fact that the 2nd East Lancashires, the left battalion of the left brigade (24th), was directed upon the junction between Mild and Cloudy, while the right brigade (23rd) had Zenith for its objective. The first attack of the left brigade failed, but the second brought them into Cloudy. By 4.15 the 2nd Scots Rifles of the 23rd Brigade had penetrated the right of Zenith, and some small parties had even moved on to Orion beyond. The central brigade (25th) had won its way up to Misty, the 2nd Lincolns, 2nd Berks, and 2nd Rifle Brigade in the lead. In the meantime the East Lancashires on the left were endeavouring to bomb their way down the maze of trenches, filled

with yard-deep mud, which separated them from their comrades. The fighting was desperate, however, and the losses considerable. The 2nd Lincolns had got detached in the labyrinth, and were out of touch with their companions. At 6.45 the Germans came again in strength and those of the Scots Rifles who had gained Orion were driven back. The casualties in this splendid battalion, which had suffered so often and so much, were once again very severe.

The Fourth Division had also had a hard fight upon the right and had made no great progress. The French upon their right had been held up after an initial advance. The 12th Brigade attacked Dewdrop, but were unable to hold it. The 11th had seized Hazy, but their grip of it was still precarious. Every position was raked with machine-guns and clogged with the all-pervading and often impassable morass. In mud and blood and driving rain, amid dirt and death, through day and night, the long death-grapple never ceased until exhaustion and winter brought a short surcease.

Upon the 24th the hard-earned gains in these trenches were consolidated. In the sector of the Eighth Division they were substantial and justified the hope that this obdurate line would go the way of all the others which had barred the army. Had it been earlier in the season it would have been easy to wait for clear weather, beat them into pulp with heavy guns, and then under a good barrage capture them by assault. But this could not be done, for Sir Douglas Haig could not afford to wait, with winter coming on and only a few weeks or days left in which to bring his men forward to their final line. The general position upon October 24 was that the 2nd



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Middlesex of the 24th Brigade held Zenith in part, that the 25th Brigade was in Gusty and held part of Misty, while the 23rd Brigade had made no advance upon the right but their left was in Cloudy and Mild.

Upon this date the Thirty-third Division came up to relieve the Fourth, and upon September 28 it made a brilliant advance which altered the whole situation in this section. At 7 A.M. on that date the 4th King's Liverpool of the 98th Brigade by a sudden dash carried the whole of Dewdrop, taking 100 prisoners. The 19th Brigade upon the right kept up with the advance, and before evening Frosty, Gunpits, and Dewdrop had all been included in the British line.

There was a pause after this advance, and then upon November 5 there was another advance of the Thirty-third, together with the French. Again there was a good gain, which was effected by the 100th Brigade on the right, and the 19th upon the left. Mirage, Boritzka, and Hazy were all reported as being at last in our hands. The 5th Scottish Rifles, 16th King's Royal Rifles, and 20th Fusiliers all distinguished themselves, and all—especially the last-named—met with considerable losses in this attack. The Seventeenth Division, which had for a few days taken the place of the Eighth, joined in this advance and extended the ground upon their front, the fighting falling chiefly to the 50th Brigade, in which the 7th York and 7th East York were the principal sufferers. Great work was also done by the 51st Brigade, the 7th Borders and the 7th Lincolns particularly distinguishing themselves. These battalions not only cleared up Zenith Trench, but upon the Germans countering they reserved their fire until the stormers were within 40 yards of them, and

then mowed down several hundreds of them. "The men marched back seven miles last night," wrote one of the officers, "after fighting for forty-eight hours without sleep, singing at the tops of their voices all the way. Priceless fellows!"

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On November 7 the Eighth Division was at work again, taking 1100 yards of front, 5 machine-guns, and 80 prisoners. The season was now far advanced and prematurely wet and cold, so that winter lines were formed by the British in this quarter with the village of Le Transloy in their immediate front. Over the rest of the line facing north there had been no serious attempt at advance during this period, and the only fighting to be recorded was on the part of the Anzac Corps, who came in at the end of October, and took over the whole front of the Fifteenth Corps in the centre of the line. These troops joined the attack already recorded upon November 5, and captured that portion of Gird Support Trench which was not yet in our possession. For a time they held Bayonet Trench, but were driven out by a strong bombing attack by the 5th Regiment of the Fourth Prussian Guards Division. The Australians and the 50th Brigade worked in close co-operation during these hard days, and it is pleasing to find the high opinion which they entertained of each other. "On several occasions," says an Australian, "we had to rely on Yorkshire grit to support our division at critical moments, and the Tikes never failed us once. We owe a big debt to the East Yorkshires in particular. We found them the most loyal of comrades." This sentiment was heartily reciprocated by the Imperial troops.

The fighting now died down in this quarter and

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the winter lull had set in, leaving the front British trenches some hundreds of yards from Le Transloy and the Bapaume Road. It would be an ungenerous Briton who would not admit that in holding us off from it so long, even if we make every allowance for the weather and its disastrous consequences to the attack, the Germans performed a fine feat of arms. It was done by fresh units which had not suffered from the gruelling which their comrades had received upon the Somme, and which would no doubt have been worn down in time, as the others had been, but they fought with great tenacity and certainly prevented our winter line from being as far forward as we had hoped.

Whilst giving the German army every credit for its tenacious resistance and for the hard digging by which it constructed so many lines of defence that five months of hard fighting and a dozen separate victories had been unable to carry the attackers through them, we must still insist upon the stupendous achievement of the British. Nearly every division had passed through the fiery ordeal of the Somme, many of them twice and thrice, and each had retired with fresh honour and new records of victory. Apart from great days of battle like July 1, July 14, September 15, and September 26, when many miles of German trench were carried with a corresponding number of prisoners and guns, there was a separate epic round each village and wood, so that the names of many of them will find immortality in military history. High Wood, Trones Wood, Mametz Wood, and Delville Wood each represents a very terrible local battle. So, too, do such village names as Ovillers, Contalmaison, Pozières, Thiepval, Longueval, Ginchy, and especially Guille-



mont. Every one of these stern contests ended with the British infantry in its objective, and in no single case were they ever driven out again. So much for the tactical results of the actions. As to the strategic effect, that was only clearly seen when the threat of renewed operations in the spring caused the German army to abandon all the positions which the Somme advance had made untenable, and to fall back upon a new line many miles to the rear. The Battle of the Marne was the turning-point of the first great German levy, the Battle of the Somme that of the second. In each case the retirement was only partial, but each clearly marked a fresh step in the struggle, upward for the Allies, downward for the Central Powers.

In the credit for this result the first place must be given to the efficiency of British leadership, which was admirable in its perseverance and in its general conception, but had, it must be admitted, not yet attained that skill in the avoidance of losses which was gradually taught by our terrible experiences and made possible by our growing strength in artillery. The severe preliminary bombardment controlled by the direct observation which is only possible after air supremacy has been attained, the counter-battery work to reduce the enemy's fire, the creeping barrage to cover the infantry, the discipline and courage which enable infantry to advance with shrapnel upon their very toes, the use of smoke clouds against flank fire, the swift advance of the barrage when a trench has fallen so as to head off fugitives and stifle the counter-attack, all these devices were constantly improving with practice, until in the arts of attack the British Army stood ahead even of their comrades of France. An intercepted communication in the shape of a

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report from General von Arnim, commanding the Fourth German Army, giving his experience of the prolonged battle, speaks of British military efficiency in every arm in a manner which must have surprised the General Staff if they were really of opinion that General Haig's army was capable of defence but not of attack. This report, with its account of the dash and tenacity of the British infantry and of the efficiency of its munitions, is as handsome a testimonial as one adversary ever paid to another, and might be called magnanimous were it not that it was meant for no eye save that of his superiors.

But all our leadership would have been vain had it not been supported by the high efficiency of every branch of the services, and by the general excellence of the *materiel*. As to the actual value of the troops, it can only be said with the most absolute truth that the infantry, artillery, and sappers all lived up to the highest traditions of the Old Army, and that the Flying Corps set up a fresh record of tradition, which their successors may emulate but can never surpass. The *materiel* was, perhaps, the greatest surprise both to friend and foe. We are accustomed in British history to find the soldier retrieving by his stubborn valour the difficulties caused by the sluggish methods of those who should supply his needs. Thanks to the labours of the Ministry of Munitions, of Sir William Robertson, and of countless devoted workers of both sexes, toiling with brain and with hand, this was no longer so. That great German army which two years before held every possible advantage that its prolonged preparation and busy factories could give it, had now, as General von Arnim's report admits, fallen into the inferior place. It was a magnificent

achievement upon which the British nation may well pride itself, if one may ever pride oneself on anything in a drama so mighty that human powers seem but the instruments of the huge contending spiritual forces behind them. The fact remains that after two years of national effort the British artillery was undoubtedly superior to that of the Germans, the British Stokes trench-mortars and light Lewis machine-guns were the best in Europe, the British aeroplanes were unsurpassed, the British Mills bomb was superior to any other, and the British tanks were an entirely new departure in the art of War. It was the British brain as well as the British heart and arm which was fashioning the future history of mankind.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE

November 13, 1916

The last effort—Failure in the north—Fine work of the Thirty-ninth, Fifty-first, and Sixty-third Divisions—Surrounding of German Fort—Capture of Beaumont Hamel—Commander Freyberg—Last operations of the season—General survey—"The unwarlike Islanders."

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THIS considerable British victory may well have a name of its own, though it was merely an extension of the gigantic effort upon the Somme. The fact, however, that it was fought upon the banks of a small subsidiary stream, and also that it was separated by a month or more from any other serious engagement, give it a place of its own in the narrative of the War.

It has already been shown at the conclusion of the chapter which deals with the flank operations by the Fifth Army, commanded by Sir Hubert Gough, that the British position after the capture of the Schwaben and other redoubts which defended the high ground to the north of Thiepval was such that the guns were able to take the German front line to the north of the Ancre in enfilade and almost in rear. Under such circumstances it might well seem that their trenches

were untenable, but their position, although difficult, was alleviated by the fact that they had been able partly to find and partly to make a series of excavations in the chalk and clay soil of the district which gave them almost complete protection against the heaviest shell-fire. Whole battalions led a troglodytic life in subterranean caverns from which they were trained to rush forth upon the alarm of an infantry advance. It was clear, however, that if the alarm should be too short their refuges might very easily become traps, as has so often been the case in the German lines of defence. The safety from shells is dearly paid for when a squad of furious stormers with Mills bombs in their hands and death in their faces glare in from the door. Their minds were kept easy, however, by the knowledge that broad fields of barbed wire, so rusty and so thick that they resembled ploughland from a distance, lay between them and the British. A very large garrison drawn from seven divisions, one of them being the 2nd Guards Reserve, held this dangerous salient in the German line.

For the attack General Gough had mustered two Army Corps of six divisions, three of which, forming the Second Corps, were to advance from the south under General Jacob, having the almost impassable mud slopes of the Ancre in front of them. Three others of the Fifth Corps, under General E. A. Fanshawe, were to storm the German line north of the Ancre. This latter movement was to be directed not only from the new British positions, but also from the old lines as far north as Serre. The advance from the west divided the enemy's gun-power, and distracted his attention from the south, so that its failure and the loss which that

failure involved, were part of the price paid for the victory.

After a two days' bombardment, which started upon November 11, and which uprooted the greater part of the German wire, the actual attack was made at six in the foggy, misty morning of November 13. It is inconceivable that the Germans were not standing to arms, since dawn had long been the hour of doom, and the furious drum-fire was certainly the overture to a battle. The thick weather, however, shrouded the British movements, and the actual rush of the infantry seems at the end to have been a surprise. Both in the western and southern advance, which covered respectively 5000 and 3000 yards, every refinement of artillery barrage which years of experience could suggest was used to form such a downpour as would protect the assailants, and beat the German riflemen and gunners back into their burrows.

Of the three divisions which attacked the old German line from the west, the most northern was the Thirty-first, with as objective the second and third German line, and to form a defensive flank between Gommecourt and Serre. This division, which contained some splendid North-country battalions from great Yorkshire towns, advanced with great intrepidity. So skilful was the barrage arranged that the 12th East Yorkshires on the left and 13th East Yorkshires on the right (10th and 11th East Yorkshires in reserve), belonging to the 92nd Brigade, had little difficulty in reaching the German front line, which was quickly mopped up. The going between the first and second line was so heavy, and the German snipers so numerous, that the barrage got ahead of the advancing waves, but after a sharp rifle fight the



second line was captured, which was the final objective of the left (12th East Yorkshires) battalion. The 13th East Yorkshires, whose final objective was the third German line, had a very severe fight before reaching that position. Owing to the failure of the division on the right of the 13th East Yorkshires to get forward, the Germans later on put in several heavy bombing counter-attacks against their right flank, which eventually drove them back to the second line, where they took up their position alongside the 12th, and for the remainder of the day repulsed numerous counter-attacks. As soon as the 12th East Yorkshires on the left had reached their objectives they consolidated it, and with the aid of the 93rd Brigade, to whom was attached the Machine-Gun Sections of the Lucknow and Sialkote Cavalry Brigades, beat off a very strong counter-attack which developed about 9.30 A.M., practically wiping it out and several minor ones during the day.

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At 2.30 P.M. the German bombardment against the 92nd became very intense, and was kept up till 5.30 P.M., in spite of which the 12th and 13th East Yorkshires stuck to their gains. It was only at 9 P.M. when the Divisional General saw that there was no prospect of the division on the right advancing that the 12th and 13th were ordered to fall back to their original line.

The experience of the Third Division upon the right or south of the Thirty-first was a very trying one. There is a strip of Picardy between those lines from Serre to the Ancre, where more Britons have given their lives for their country and for the cause of humanity than in any area in this or any other war. Twice it has been the scene of tragic

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losses, on July 1, and yet again on November 13, though, as already said, it is well in each case to regard the general result rather than the local tragedy. Once again the Third Division gave itself freely and unselfishly for the common cause. In this case, also, the cause of the scanty results lay in the heavy ground and the uncut wire. In the case of the 76th Brigade, which may be taken as typical of its neighbours, it advanced to the immediate south of the 93rd, and experienced even more difficult conditions. The 2nd Suffolks and the 10th Welsh Fusiliers were in the van, but the 8th Royal Lancasters and 1st Gordons came up in support, the whole thick line of men clustering in front of the wire and endeavouring to hack a way. Sergeants and officers were seen in front of the obstacle endeavouring to find some way through. Here and there a few pushful men, both from the 76th Brigade and from the 9th upon its right, did succeed in passing, but none of these ever returned. Finally, a retreat was ordered through a pelting barrage, and even in their own front-line trenches the troops were exposed to a furious shell-fall. It was an unfortunate business and the losses were heavy.

Immediately upon the right of the Third Division was the Second Division, which attacked with the 5th and 6th Brigades in the van, the latter being on the immediate flank of the Third Division, and sharing in the obstacles which faced that division and the check which resulted from them. The immediate objective was the great Munich Trench lurking within its far-flung spider-web of wire. Although all of the 6th Brigade save the right-hand battalion were brought to a stand, and wound up in their own trenches, the 5th Brigade got well forward

and might have got farther had it not meant the exposure of their left flank. In the evening the 99th Brigade, the victors of Delville Wood, were brought up with orders to form a defensive flank to the north, while they furnished two battalions for a farther advance to continue the success gained by the 5th Brigade. In the early morning of November 14 these two units, the 1st Rifles and 1st Berkshires, advanced in a proper November fog, which caused some misdirection, and eventually the failure of the attack, for two smaller trenches were carried under the impression that each was the Munich. Some ground and prisoners were, however, gained, but not the main objective.

Meanwhile, to return to the narrative of the previous day, a very different tale was to be told of those divisions which were operating farther to the south, where the ridge between Serre and Beaumont Hamel sheltered the attack from the formidable German gun-power at Pusieux and Bucquoy in the north.

Of the three divisions attacking from the south the Thirty-ninth was to the south of the Ancre, the Sixty-Third Naval Division upon its left on the north bank of the Ancre, and the Fifty-first Highland Division still farther to the left opposite Beaumont Hamel. The task of the Thirty-ninth Division was to clear out the Germans who held on to the Hansa line, the last German trench system between the British front and the river. Their chief protection was the almost incredible condition of the ground, which consisted of tenacious mud of varying and occasionally of dangerous depth. Munitions could only be got across it upon pack-horses, on special



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paths. In spite of these difficulties, the Thirty-ninth Division carried the lines of trenches and the village of St. Pierre Divion as well, the resistance being far from heroic. The attack was made by the 117th Brigade, which advanced with such speed that the front waves, consisting of the 16th Rifle Brigade upon the right and the 17th Sherwood Foresters upon the left, were into the German trenches before the barrage could fall. It did fall, however, and did great harm to the supports, both the 17th Rifles and 16th Sherwoods losing heavily, especially the former. The British line was pushed right up to the river, and the survivors of the garrison—some 1400 in number—were compelled to lay down their arms. This attack to the south of the river was an isolated, self-contained operation, apart from the larger and more serious movement on the north bank.

The right of the main assault was carried out by the gallant Sixty-third Royal Naval Division, whose emergency baptism of fire at Antwerp has been mentioned in this narrative, though its subsequent splendid services at Gallipoli have not come within its scope. After the evacuation of Gallipoli and the subsequent redistribution of the eastern army, at least three fine divisions, the Eleventh, the Forty-second, and the Naval, besides the splendid Australian and New Zealand infantry, were transferred to the French front. This action of the Ancre was the first opportunity which these volunteer sailors had had of showing upon a large European stage those qualities which had won them fame elsewhere.

The Naval Division attacked to the immediate north of the Ancre, having the river upon their right. The lines of assault were formed under cover of dark-

ness, for the assembly trenches were inadequate and the ground occupied was under direct observation from the German lines. The division in this formation was a thick mass of 10,000 infantry on a front of about 1600 yards with a depth of 300. Fortunately, the screen of the weather covered them completely, and there was little and random shelling during the night, but the men were stiff and chilled by their long vigil, during which they might neither speak nor smoke. At last, just before dawn, the crash of the barrage told that the hour had come, and the lines moved forward, keeping well up to the shower of shrapnel which crept on at the rate of 100 yards in five minutes, searching every hollow and crevice of the ground.

The first objective was the enemy's front-line system of triple trenches. The second was a road in the hollow behind called Station Road, with trenches on either side of it. The third was the trenches which fringed the village of Beaucourt. The fourth, which was only to be attempted after the third was consolidated, was the village itself, which lies among trees upon the north side of the river.

The advance of the 189th Brigade on the right of the Naval Division, consisting of the Hood, Hawke, Nelson, and Drake battalions, was comparatively easy, as they were partly protected from flank fire by the dead ground formed by the low-lying northern slope down to the river. With great dash and vigour they carried the successive lines of trenches, and before mid-day they were consolidating the third objective with the village in their immediate front.

A much more difficult task confronted the centre of the advance, consisting of the left half of the right brigade, and the right half of the 188th Brigade,

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which contained the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Marines, the Ansons and the Howes. In the very track of their course lay a formidable German redoubt, bristling with machine-guns, and so concealed that neither the observers nor the bombardment had spotted it. This serious obstacle caused heavy losses to the central attack, and as it completely commanded their advance it held them to such cover as they could find. The left of the advance got past the redoubt, however, and reached the sunken road, where they were in close touch with the Scotsmen upon their left. Thus at this period of the advance the Naval Division formed a deep curve with its right wing well forward, its centre held back, and its left wing nearly as far advanced as its right. The mist was so thick that it was very difficult to tell from the rear what was going on in the battle, but the 190th Brigade held in reserve was aware that some hitch had occurred, and pushing forward in the hope of retrieving it, found itself involved in the fierce fighting round the redoubt, where it also was exposed to heavy loss. This brigade, it may be mentioned, was not naval, but contained the 1st Honourable Artillery Company, the 4th Bedfords, 7th Royal Fusiliers, and 10th Dublins. The German fort could not be reduced, nor could progress be made in the centre in face of its machine-guns; but the infantry, which had passed it on either side, extended along the Sunken Road behind it, and joined hands so as to cut it off. The whole German second line was then in their possession, and the right third of their third line as well. The enemy still held firm, however, in the centre of the first-line system, and showed no signs of weakening, although they must have known that British troops



were in their rear. An attempt was made to re-bombard this portion of the line, but it was difficult for the gunners without aerial observation to locate the exact portion of the line which still remained with the enemy, and there was great danger of the shells falling among our own infantry. About three in the afternoon the conclusion was reached that it was better for the time to leave this great pocket of Germans alone, cutting them off from either escape or reinforcement.

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The 111th Brigade from the Thirty-seventh Division was therefore sent up, battalion by battalion, along the river-bank until it passed the central obstacle and reached the Sunken Road. Thence the 13th Rifles were sent forward with orders to reach the advanced line, where the Hoods and Drakes, somewhat reduced in numbers but not in spirit, were lying in front of Beaucourt. It was dark before these changes could be made. The Riflemen, when they had attained their position, rested their right upon the Ancre, and prolonged their left, clearing the Germans out in that direction. This movement to the left was strengthened in the early morning when the 13th Rifle Brigade and the 13th Royal Fusiliers of the same brigade came up to join in, whilst the H.A.C. also advanced and took up a position on the right of the naval men.

About seven o'clock the assault upon the village was ordered, under the direction and leadership of Commander Freyberg of the Hoods, already twice wounded, and wounded once again before his task was finished. Sailors and Riflemen rushed forward at the signal, and dashed with fierce impetuosity over the German line and down the streets of the hamlet. The Honourable Artillery Company upon the right

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joined in the charge. It was completely successful, the houses were rapidly cleared, the dug-outs taken, and many hundreds of prisoners secured. The Riflemen emerging on the farther side of the village immediately dug in under the direction of their only remaining company officer. A footbridge was at the same time thrown across the Ancre, so as to connect up with the Thirty-ninth Division on the south.

The German redoubt had held out manfully until its line of retreat was entirely cut off, and even then showed signs of continued resistance. The tanks had already won such a position in the army that they had become one of the last resources of the commander who was in difficulties. During the night of November 13 three of these engines were sent for to help in reducing the intractable German centre. Their performance was typical both of their weakness and of their value in this early stage of their evolution. One was hit and disabled before ever it crossed the lines. A second stuck in the mud and refused to budge. The third won its way over the German front line and so terrorised the obstinate garrison that they were finally induced to lay down their arms. Eight hundred prisoners came from this one pocket, and the whole capture of the Naval Division amounted to nearly 2000 men.

The advance of the Fifty-first Highland Territorial Division upon the immediate left of the Naval Division had been equally successful, and had ended in the capture of the important village of Beaumont Hamel with all its network of caverns, a great store of machine-guns, and 1500 of the garrison. The objectives of the division may be said to have been the continuation of those of the Naval Division, substituting Beaumont Hamel for Beaucourt, but the position

was complicated by a deep ravine, called after its shape the Y Ravine, which ran down from the village to the German trenches. The ground over which the advance was made was still littered with the skeletons clad in rags which represented the men who had fallen in the attack of July 1. Now, after five months, they were gloriously avenged. The rush of the division was headed by the 153rd Brigade, with the 4th and 7th Gordons in the lead. These two fine battalions carried the front German lines, but on reaching the Sunken Road they gave place to the 6th and 7th Black Watch behind them, who carried the attack up the Y Ravine and on to Beaumont, while the Seaforths and Argylls of the other brigades, with their staunch Lowland comrades of the 9th Royal Scots, thickened the line of attack, and gave it the weight to carry each successive obstacle. Only in the Y Ravine was there any momentary check to the fiery advance. There for a short time the Germans stood stoutly to their task, and there was some of that man-to-man work which the Scotsman loves. Then the last signs of resistance died out, and before the late afternoon the whole position was in the hands of the assailants, who pushed on and occupied the low ridge to the north which separates it from Serre. One curious incident connected with the close of the action was, that a mopping-up party of Gordons in one of the front lines of trenches were suddenly surprised and captured by a considerable body of Germans, who emerged suddenly from an underground tunnel. In the evening, however, the positions were reversed, and the prisoners were rescued, while the Germans had to surrender to the victors. Fifteen hundred prisoners and 54 machine-guns were the



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spoils of the Fifty-first Division; but these were considerably increased when the dug-outs were more carefully examined next day. Altogether nearly 7000 officers and men were captured in the course of the action.

Whilst the considerable action of Beaumont Hamel was fought upon the left, the various divisions upon the south of the river forming the remainder of Gough's Fifth Army all made a forward movement and gained ground. Of these divisions, the Thirty-ninth, whose doings have already been described, was nearest to the main battle, and was most heavily engaged, winning a complete success. Upon its right in the order given were the Nineteenth and the Eighteenth, connecting up with Rawlinson's Fourth Army upon the right. These various divisions all moved their lines forward in the direction of the river-bank, with the villages of Grandcourt and Petit Mirau-mont in their front. These movements were rather in the nature of a feint and a demonstration, so that they were not accompanied by any severe fighting. It had been planned, however, that as these divisions advanced to the north the space which would be left between Gough's right and Rawlinson's left should be filled up by the Thirty-second Division, which should push on in the direction of Pys. This movement gave rise to some severe fighting in which the historical 14th Brigade sustained some heavy losses. The immediate obstacle in front of the division was a powerful system of trenches lying amid morasses caused by the recent heavy rains, and known as the Munich Line, with the Frankfort line behind it. Upon November 17 the division took over the advanced trenches, while the

Eighteenth Division side-stepped to the left. The Thirty-second Division had formed its line for attack, with the 14th Brigade upon the left and the 97th upon the right, the leading battalions from left to right being the 15th Highland Light Infantry, the 2nd Manchesters, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, and another battalion of H.L.I. The advance was to have been upon the 17th, but from the beginning a series of misfortunes occurred, arising largely from the weather, the condition of the trenches, and the severe German barrage behind the line, which made all preparations difficult and costly. The attack was postponed till the 18th, and even then the advancing battalions were short of bombs, without which trench fighting becomes impossible. The ground behind the troops was so awful that one mile in an hour was considered remarkable progress for an unladen messenger; while the enemy's fire was so severe that of six runners sent with a despatch only the last arrived unwounded. The Germans in front appeared to be both numerous and full of fight, and upon the 17th they made a vain attack upon the advanced line of the 14th Brigade. Two companies of the Manchesters sustained upon this day the losses of half their number as they lay, an object lesson in silent patient discipline in the muddy bottom of a shell-swept ditch.

At 6.10 in the morning of the 18th an advance was made, but the bomb supplies had not yet come up and the disadvantages were great. None the less, the first line of German trenches was successfully carried by the Manchesters, but the 15th Highland Light Infantry were held up by wire and were unable to get forward, while the Yorkshire Light Infantry

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upon the right got through at some points and were held at others. The Manchesters even penetrated to the second line of trenches and sprang into them, but the fatal want of bombs tied their hands, and a counter-attack of the Germans retook the position. The Highland Light Infantry had fallen back upon Serre Trench, and were pressed by a party of the enemy, but fortunately some of the 1st Dorsets came up from the rear with some bombs, and the situation was saved. In the meantime the position of those Manchesters and Yorkshiremen who had got forward as far as the second trench, and were exposed without bombs to a bombing attack, was very serious. They had taken a number of prisoners and some of these they managed to send back, but the greater part of the British were bombed to pieces, and all died where they fought or were taken by the enemy. A single survivor who returned from the final stand made by these gallant men stated that he was the last man who had crawled out of the trench, and that his comrades lay dead or dying in a group in front of a blazing dug-out, the woodwork of which had taken fire. A patrol next day came upon the bodies of an officer and forty men who had died fighting to the last in a single group.

On the left of the Thirty-second Division some movement forward had been necessary upon the part both of the Eighteenth Division and of the Nineteenth, in order to keep the left flank of Jacob's Second Corps on the south of the river level with the right flank of Fanshawe's Fifth Corps upon the northern bank. This operation did not involve much work upon the part of the Eighteenth, but the movement of the Nineteenth was difficult and complex, with Grandcourt as



a possible objective. It meant an attack upon a maze of trenches under the worst possible terrestrial conditions, while the advance had really to be in three different directions—due north, north-east, and almost due east. The 57th Brigade, strengthened by the 7th South Lancashires of the 56th Brigade, was chosen for the difficult task. At 6 A.M. upon November 18 in a sharp snow-storm the advance began.

It was the last concerted operation of the year, but it was not unfortunately destined for success. The garrison of the trenches appear to have been as numerous as the stormers and far more advantageously placed. The ground was such that an advance over it without opposition would have been no easy matter. Upon the left two battalions, the 7th South Lincs and the 8th Gloucesters, old battle companions of La Boiselle, pushed vigorously forward and seized the western outskirt of Grandcourt, where they held on against every attempt to dislodge them. Stick bombs, egg bombs, rifle-grenades, and every sort of evil missile crashed and splintered around them, but they had in command two leaders who might be trusted to hold what they had taken. Only next evening when the rest of the attack had definitely failed did these two battalions withdraw to a new line on the immediate west of the village, taking 150 prisoners with them.

The other three battalions had fared ill owing to numerical weakness, lack of knowledge of the ground, loss of direction, bad weather, and deadly machine-guns. Half of the 8th North Staffords won their way through to the objective, but their comrades could not support them, and they were so isolated that, after a

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gallant resistance, they were nearly all destroyed or captured, under very much the same circumstances as the 2nd Manchesters upon the preceding day. The commander of the North Staffords, Colonel Anderson, a gallant South African, and several other officers were wounded and taken. Colonel Torrie of the 7th East Lancashires was also killed in this engagement. An attempt upon the part of the 9th Cheshires later in the evening to get into touch with their lost comrades only served to swell the casualty lists, for it was dark before it was initiated, and all direction was impossible amid the labyrinth of mud-channels which faced them. Two days later the Nineteenth Division was relieved by the Eleventh. It is difficult to exaggerate the extreme hardships which had been endured by the whole of Jacob's corps during these operations amid the viscid mud slopes of the Ancre. Napoleon in Poland had never better cause to curse the fourth element. The front trenches were mere gutters, and every attempt to deepen them only deepened the stagnant pool within. The communications were little better. The mud was on the men's bodies, in their food, and for ever clogging both their feet and their weapons. The hostile shelling was continuous. It was a nightmare chapter of the campaign.

Winter had now settled down once more cheerless and prolonged. There was much to be done in those months of gloom—divisions to be refilled, fresh divisions to be brought out, munitions of every sort to be stored for the days of wrath to come. But apart from the preparations for the future, the army was never quiet, for one long succession of trench raids, exploratory attacks, and bombardments helped to retain that ascendancy which had been gained in

the long Battle of the Somme. Before the narrative passes to the German retreat of 1917, and the dramatic battles which followed it, it would be well to take a brief survey of the other events which had occurred during the last half of the year, all of which reacted more or less directly upon the campaign in the west.

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The chief of these is undoubtedly the magnificent French recovery at Verdun. As already stated, the German pressure was very severe in June, but it was rapidly lessened by the counter-pressure of the Allied advance upon the Somme. In their attempt to hold back the Franco-British advance the Germans denuded their Verdun line to an extent which weakened it so much that, far from advancing, it could not hold its own. In two splendid assaults upon October 24 and December 15, the first yielding 5000 prisoners and the second 11,000 with 115 guns, the French drove the Germans back until a considerable portion of their former hard-won gains had disappeared. Considering the efforts which France was making upon the Somme it was a splendid achievement, and it may fairly be added to the credit of the Somme Battle, since without it, it could hardly have been possible.

The second considerable factor was one of those great Russian advances which, alternating with equally great Russian retreats, each of them coming with a constant rhythm, made the war of the Eastern Front resemble some sort of majestic and terrible tide, with an ebb and flow which left death and destruction strewn over those unhappy border countries. On this occasion the advance was in the Brody and Stanislau direction, and was pushed with such energy and success by the fiery Brusiloff that nearly 400,000 prisoners—or perhaps Slavonic refugees would be a



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more accurate description—were taken by our Allies. The movement extended from June to September, and might have been a vital one, had it not been for political disorganisation and treachery in the rear.

The Italian armies had in the meanwhile given a splendid account of themselves, as every one who had seen them in the field, predicted that they would. Though hard pressed by a severe Austrian attack in the Trentino in May, they rallied and held the enemy before he could debouch upon the plains. Then with three hard blows delivered upon August 6 to August 9, where they took the town of Gorizia and 12,000 prisoners, on October 10, and on November 1 they broke the Austrian lines and inflicted heavy losses upon them. The coming of winter saw them well upon their way to Trieste.

On August 4 the British forces in Egypt defeated a fresh Turco-German attack upon that country. The battle was near Romani, east of the Suez Canal, and it ended in a creditable victory and the capture of 2500 prisoners. This was the end of the serious menace for Egypt, and the operations in this quarter, which were carried on by General Murray, were confined from this time forwards to clearing up the Sinai peninsula, where various Turkish posts were dispersed or taken, and in advancing our line to the Palestine Frontier.

On August 8 our brave little ally, Portugal, threw her sword into the scale of freedom, and so gave military continuity to the traditions of the two nations. It would have rejoiced the austere soul of the great Duke to see the descendants of his much-valued Caçadores, fighting once more beside the great-grandsons of the Riflemen and Guardsmen of the Peninsula.

Two divisions appeared in France, where they soon made a reputation for steadiness and valour.

In the East another valiant little nation had also ranged herself with the Allies, and was destined, alas, to meet her ruin through circumstances which were largely beyond her own control. Upon August 27 Roumania declared war, and with a full reliance upon help which never reached her, advanced at once into the south of Hungary. Her initial successes changed to defeat, and her brave soldiers, who were poorly provided with modern appliances of war, were driven back before the pressure of Falkenhayn's army in the west and Mackensen's, which eventually crossed the Danube, from the south. On December 6 Bucharest fell, and by the end of the year the Roumanians had been driven to the Russian border, where, an army without a country, they hung on, exactly as the Belgians had done, to the extreme edge of their ravaged fatherland. To their Western allies, who were powerless to help them, it was one of the most painful incidents of the War.

The Salonica expedition had been much hampered by the sinister attitude of the Greeks, whose position upon the left rear of Sarraill's forces made an advance dangerous, and a retreat destructive. King Constantine, following the example of his brother-in-law of Berlin, had freed himself from all constitutional ties, refused to summon a parliament, and followed his own private predilections and interests by helping our enemies, even to the point of surrendering a considerable portion of his own kingdom, including a whole army corps and the port of Kavala, to the hereditary enemy, the Bulgarian. Never in history has a nation been so betrayed by its king, and never,

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it may be added, did a nation which had been free allow itself so tamely to be robbed of its freedom. Venezelos, however, showed himself to be a great patriot, shook the dust of Athens from his feet, and departed to Salonica, where he raised the flag of a fighting national party, to which the whole nation was eventually rallied. Meanwhile, however, the task of General Sarraill was rendered more difficult, in spite of which he succeeded in regaining Monastir and establishing himself firmly within the old Serbian frontier—a result which was largely due to the splendid military qualities of the remains of the Serbian army.

On December 12 the German Empire proposed negotiations for peace, but as these were apparently to be founded upon the war-map as it then stood, and as they were accompanied by congratulatory messages about victory from the Kaiser to his troops, they were naturally not regarded as serious by the Allies. Our only guarantee that a nation will not make war whenever it likes is its knowledge that it cannot make peace when it likes, and this was the lesson which Germany was now to learn. By the unanimous decision of all the Allied nations no peace was possible which did not include terms which the Germans were still very far from considering—restitution of invaded countries, reparation for harm done, and adequate guarantees against similar unprovoked aggression in the future. Without these three conditions the War would indeed have been fought in vain.

This same month of December saw two of the great protagonists who had commenced the War retire from that stage upon which each had played a worthy part. The one was Mr. Asquith, who,



weary from long labours, gave place to the fresh energy of Mr. Lloyd George. The other was "Father" Joffre, who bore upon his thick shoulders the whole weight of the early campaigns. Both names will live honourably in history.

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And now as the year drew to its close, Germany, wounded and weary, saw as she glared round her at her enemies, a portent which must have struck a chill to her heart. Russian strength had been discounted and that of France was no new thing. But whence came this apparition upon her Western flank—a host raised, as it seemed, from nowhere, and yet already bidding fair to be equal to her own? Her public were still ignorant and blind, bemused by the journals which had told them so long, and with such humorous detail, that the British army was a paper army, the creature of a dream. Treitschke's foolish phrase, "The unwarlike Islanders," still lingered pleasantly in their memory. But the rulers, the men who knew, what must have been their feelings as they gazed upon that stupendous array, that vision of doom, a hundred miles from wing to wing, gleaming with two million bayonets, canopied with aeroplanes, fringed with iron-clad motor monsters, and backed by an artillery which numbered its guns by the thousand? Kitchener lay deep in the Orkney waves, but truly his spirit was thundering at their gates. His brain it was who first planted these seeds, but how could they have grown had the tolerant, long-suffering British nation not been made ready for it by all those long years of Teutonic insult, the ravings of crazy professors, and the insults of unbalanced publicists? All of these had a part in raising that great host, but others, too, can claim their share: the baby-killers of Scarborough, the

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Zeppelin murderers, the submarine pirates, all the agents of ruthlessness. Among them they had put life and spirit into this avenging apparition, where even now it could be said that every man in the battle line had come there of his own free will. Years of folly and of crime were crying for a just retribution. The instrument was here and the hour was drawing on.

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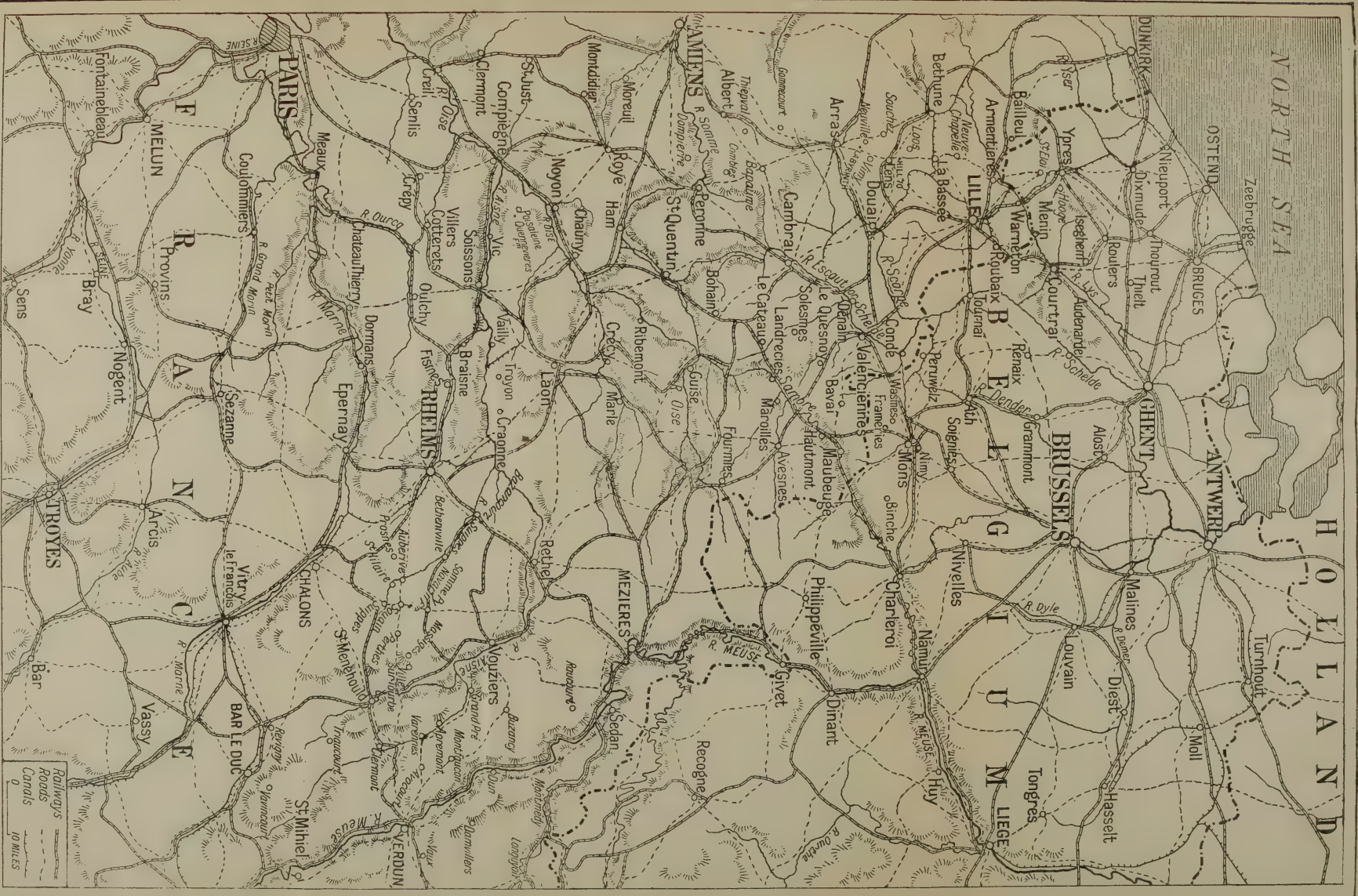
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# THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN

IN

## FRANCE AND FLANDERS, 1915

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